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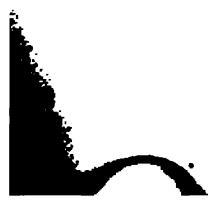
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BLUE AND GREEN.



BLUE AND GREEN

OR,

THE GIFT OF GOD.

A Romance of Old Constantinople.

BY

SIR HENRY POTTINGER.

IN THREE VOLUMES.
VOL. I.



LONDON:
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1879.

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TO MY DEAR FRIEND,

AND COMPANION IN MANY WANDERINGS,

JOHN YOUNG SARGENT,

FELLOW OF HERTFORD COLLEGE, OXFORD,

THIS BOOK IS INSCRIBED.

P R E F A C E.

THIS book possesses a prologue, as well as a kind of post-initial preface, but I desire nevertheless to say a few words which cannot be incorporated with either. The view which I have taken of the character of Theodora is in many respects opposed to the traditional one, as rendered by Gibbon on the authority of Procopius. I think it is Dean Milman who remarks that the Secret History of Procopius is the most disgraceful and virulent libel in literature, as indeed any one who takes the trouble to read it, in connection with the other works of the Byzantine historian, will be disposed to allow.

The tale of Theodora's excessive depravity in her earlier years, unrelieved by any redeeming quali-

ties or circumstances, rests entirely on this libel. Gibbon, whilst affecting to throw discredit upon it, nevertheless gloats over its shameful details with that appreciative and salacious irony which is one of the great historian's chief characteristics. There can be little doubt that Theodora was of base origin, the daughter of an Ursarius, or keeper of wild beasts; that at an early age she was devoted to the stage, and led the profligate life of most women in her profession. Her great beauty, and in all probability—although the malice of Procopius would deny it—her grace and skill, made her conspicuous above her fellows. There can be as little doubt, that as soon as she obtained the chance she exhibited many admirable and heroic attributes, that she elevated herself to be the fit consort of a disciplinarian and theologian like Justinian, and that her perfect chastity after her union with him is established—as Gibbon himself remarks—upon the complete silence of her implacable enemies. The writer of fiction may fairly claim for such a woman that in her misfortunes she was the victim of circumstances, and that it

was the nobler side of her nature which triumphed in the end.

The author of a German romance, published in an English version a short time back, under the title of "A Struggle for Rome," has indeed out-Procopiused Procopius, and without any authority, except, it may be, his own disbelief in the reformation of a woman, has depicted the Empress Theodora as a Messalina of the worst type, even to the day of her death, which he represents as suicide consequent on the detection of her guilt! But the two or three chapters of "A Struggle for Rome" in which she appears, have perhaps but little claim on the sympathy of any class of readers, except the antiquarian.

More than one romance has been grounded on the life of Belisarius, but in each case on the middle and close of it. A reference to Lord Mahon's work will show that little or nothing (if we except a guess at his birthplace) is known of the hero's early youth, which is therefore also fair material for the writer of fiction. The same remark applies to the youthful career of his wife,

the celebrated Antonina. Of Ecebolus the Tyrian, history contains the brief notice that Theodora accompanied him from Constantinople to Africa. Hardly less scanty are the authentic details concerning John of Cappadocia, up to the time when he attained high office, and became a notorious man.

I am disposed to believe that modern turns of thought and expression are most acceptable to modern readers. I have not, therefore, much concerned myself to give to this book any strong archaic flavour. Human nature remains the same in all ages; the manners and customs of the sixth century in the East bore sufficient resemblance to those of our own times to warrant some strength of comparison; there are probably few colloquialisms of the present day—even to its slang—but have their equivalent in the dead languages. Writing for modern ears, the interchange may be effected without much impropriety.

In this attempt to modernize a very old story, I have endeavoured to avoid actual incongruities; but I will not affirm that the eye of acute criticism

may not detect an anachronism here and there. At the same time I entreat readers to take for granted a good deal which I have thought it unnecessary to explain. If, for instance, I mention a young lady's neat gloves, I do not enlarge upon the undoubted fact that the fair Byzantines were as careful to be *bien gantées et chaussées* as their nineteenth-century sisters of London and Paris ; if I speak of sumptuous carriages and splendid liveries, it must be understood that such things were as fully appreciated in Old Constantinople as in Belgravia ; if of thoroughbreds and trials, that without blood and training no horses of mortal breed could have been found to do two miles in harness at racing speed.

In the following pages some mention is made of the Bulgarians. At the time when "Blue and Green" was commenced the name of Bulgaria was seldom pronounced by civilized lips, and its existence on the map of Europe was to most people in England a matter of indifference. It has since become literally a household word. At the present time the Bulgarians are regarded by a

large section of society—and with good reason—as a harmless pastoral race, victims to Turkish misrule, and recently goaded into atrocious reprisals by Turkish brutality. But I wish to state that *my* Bulgarians belong to that people which, in common with Hungarians, Poles, Croats, and other oppressed nationalities of the present century, was one of the great scourges of Eastern Europe; which, although it afterwards adopted, and now claims, Slavonic Brotherhood, was in its origin kindred to the Turk; which for century after century carried fire and sword and rapine into the fairest provinces of the Eastern Empire, sparing neither age nor sex, and twice besieged Constantinople; which founded two kingdoms, the one trans-, the other cis-Danubian, and produced a long line of sovereign princes; and which, finally, experienced the most terrible of all Bulgarian atrocities on record at the hands of Basil II., who out of fifteen thousand prisoners spared the eyes of every hundredth man, that he might lead his blinded comrades home.

The historical matter of two or three chapters

towards the close of the third volume is contained in Lord Mahon's Life of Belisarius, drawn from the same source, the Persian Wars of Procopius. Similarity of description is in such a case almost unavoidable; but I have always consulted original authorities in the hope of finding details—such as the combat of Andreas with the Persian champions—which, while too insignificant for the historian, might be invaluable to the romancist. I have not scrupled to borrow freely from Gibbon; and acknowledge my indebtedness to an excellent article on Niebuhr's edition of the Byzantine Historians, in a far back number of the *Quarterly Magazine*.

H. P.



CONTENTS OF VOL. I.



BOOK I.

CHAPTER		PAGE
	PROLOGUE	1
I.	FATHER AND DAUGHTER	13
II.	ARCADES AMBO	34
III.	THE AUGUSTEUM	47
IV.	TRISAGION	60
V.	IMPERIOUS CÆSAR	73
VI.	THE MASTER OF THE BEARS	92
VII.	THE GIFT OF GOD	112
VIII.	KAKON KAPPA	125
IX.	A WOMAN OF BUSINESS	142
X.	JUSTINIAN	165
XI.	THE SUPPLIANTS	182
XII.	THE END OF THE FIRST ACT	203

BOOK II.

I.	BELITZAR	215
II.	THE BULGARIAN HORSE	228
III.	VOX POPULI	248
IV.	THE LODGE OF THE RISING SUN	266
V.	THE CHALCEDONIAN STAIRS	297



BLUE AND GREEN.

PROLOGUE.

DURING several centuries the annals of the Christian Church in the East are disfigured by a lamentable appendix : a catalogue of inhuman outrages, atrocious crimes, and wholesale massacres, perpetrated, under the cloak of religious zeal, by bigotry and fanaticism.

In those unhappy times, council after council, synod upon synod, swayed by men whose great natural gifts were devoted unscrupulously to the furtherance of their personal ambition or the unsparing chastisement of their opponents, failed in defining or enforcing the boundaries of a satisfactory and intelligible faith ; the most subtle intellects of Christendom vied with each other in overlaying the grand and simple outlines of Christianity with a hatch-work of minute and vexatious

sophisms; and the world was distracted by the furious dissensions of those who, differing only on some scarcely appreciable point, on the interpretation or addition of a sentence, on the rejection or acceptance of a single monosyllable, cursed and reviled each other as heretics, and hurled the worst of human passions into the scale in favour of their especial creeds.

The tenets of Arius, Apollinaris, Cerinthus, Nestorius, Eutyches, and a host of minor authorities, served in turn as fuel to the fire. All ranks and classes, ecclesiastical and civil, from Patriarch to chorister, from Emperor to peasant, were attacked by the same burning frenzy of dispute; the ardour communicated itself to women and even children, and the streets of the Eastern capitals witnessed as horrid sacrifices to the Holy Catholic Faith as ever disgraced the rites of heathen idolatry.

Truly the gold of Christianity was being refined in a seven-times heated furnace; and the student who stands aghast and indignant before the appalling picture presented to him, has need of all his patience to accept the apology of Evagrius, an historian of the times:—

“ Let none presume to sneer, as if the object of successive councils had been simply to depose their predecessors, and to be for ever devising some alteration in the faith. For while we strive to analyze the ineffable and incomprehensible scheme

of Divine mercy, and to extol and exalt it to the utmost, our opinions are liable to be swayed towards various conclusions : to none of those who have originated heresies among Christians can we impute deliberate and initial blasphemy ; they fell away from the truth, not from any intention of dishonouring God, but possessed by the idea that in advancing their respective doctrines they could improve upon the work of their predecessors.

“Moreover, we are all unanimous in a confession which involves the essential points : a Trinity is the single object of our worship ; Unity the complex object of our glorification ; and the Word, who being God begotten before all worlds, in mercy to mankind became flesh by a second birth.

“The novel doctrines which have been started on other points arose also from the freedom of thought vouchsafed to us by God the Saviour, even on such subjects as these ; in order that the Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church might be the better exercised in submitting contending opinions to the yoke of piety and truth, and be brought thereby into the one straight and even way.

“Accordingly the apostle plainly says, ‘There is need of heresies among you, that the approved ones may be manifested.’

“Here again we have occasion to glorify the ineffable wisdom of God, who to Paul the divine said, ‘My strength is made perfect in weakness :’

through those very causes whereby certain members have been lopped off the Church, the true and pure faith has been more firmly established, and the Catholic and Apostolic Church of God has attained amplification and exaltation to heaven."

But it is significant that the apologist, who was probably on the whole a more temperate and liberal-minded man than most of his contemporaries, cannot conceal his virulent animosity against those whose unfortunate zeal for improvement had led them into error. "Impious," "God-assaulter," "malignant spirit," "workshop of blasphemy," and the like, are epithets which flow freely from his pen; he quotes with peculiar satisfaction the account given by the arch-heretic Nestorius of his sufferings in exile, and concludes with the following charitable comment:—

"Thus does this man, who had not learned moderation even by his sufferings, in his writings strike and trample with fist and heel, reviling both the supreme and provincial governments. I learn from one who wrote an account of his demise, that, when his tongue had been eaten through with worms, he departed to the greater and everlasting judgment which awaited him."

The arch-heresy of Nestorius consisted chiefly in an attempt to reconcile two contending parties in the Eastern Church; the one maintaining that the Virgin Mary ought to be styled "Theotocos," or

the mother of God, the other, "Anthropotocos," or the mother of man. Nestorius devised as a middle term, "Christotocos," the mother of Christ, and by this ingenious and well-meant amendment incurred the bitter wrath of both sides. Driven into bolder assertion, he subsequently refused to apply the unqualified term God to that of which it might be predicated that it was two months or three months old.

At the same epoch, in addition to its troubles on the score of religion, the city of Constantinople was distracted by the quarrels of the Blue and Green Factions of the Circus, so called from the hue of the liveries or badges which distinguished them.

Under one or other of these denominations was ranked the entire population; the two original colours, white and red, having gradually fallen into disuse except for the occasional purpose of a chariot race.

Such veins of crime and brutality as were left untouched by the advocates of religion were worked to exhaustion by the partisans of the Hippodrome; a specious and superficial connection was established between the two, and the maintenance of orthodoxy or the punishment of heresy, in the elastic and accommodating cant of the times, were too often the watchwords of those whose sole object was the gratification of their own greed, lust, or revenge.

To work out in detail the catalogue of human crimes, was not enough for these Factions. Isolated acts of murder, rape, robbery, and incendiarism failed to satisfy their fury. Whole streets were set on fire and pillaged, and the inhabitants subjected at the hands of their fellow-citizens to the worst outrages which follow the storming of a besieged city ; while at other times slaughter not unworthy of a pitched battle signalized their mutual hate. It is recorded that at a single festival, the Greens, who had concealed daggers in baskets of fruit, destroyed not less than three thousand of the Blues.

On certain occasions which seemed to offer unusual advantages to enterprising crime, the Factions in a manner suspended hostilities, like wild beasts that hunt in couples. At such times they became irresistible, and their coalition of the highest political importance.

At the date when our story commences, the religious feud between Anastasius, Emperor of the East, and Macedonius, the Patriarch of Constantinople, was at its height.

It was the misfortune of the former to be called to the throne at a time of life when opinions have become passions, and preferences prejudices—he was sixty years of age when Ariadne, the widow of his Imperial predecessor Zeno, married him, and raised him from the position of a domestic in the palace to that of Emperor—and in an age when

there was but little scope for the exercise of those negative virtues in which he excelled.

The encouraging advice of the public, “Reign as you have lived,” was easy to offer but difficult to follow.

The good qualities of moderation, economy, and tolerance, which sat so well upon the Silentiary, became weaknesses, even faults, in an Emperor. Modest worth was incompatible with the spirit of the times. Paradox as it may appear, a man of strong religious feelings was forced to become more than half a scoundrel to support them.

From his youth the Emperor had been zealously attached to the so-called Eutychian or Monophysite heresy, an attachment which, however culpable in the eyes of severe theologians, was practically innocent enough until the purple rendered it conspicuous, and forced him into becoming its champion.

The heresy of the Archimandrite Eutyches, that of the Saviour’s one incarnate nature, may be briefly summed up in his own words : “I allow,” said he, “that our Lord was produced from two natures before their union, but I confess only one nature after their union.”

To this heresy, then, the Emperor Anastasius stood committed. On his elevation he had been induced to sign a written oath that he would do nothing prejudicial to the Catholic faith ; this bond

was now in the hands of Macedonius, and no amount of persuasion or intimidation could bring the Patriarch to restore that which he treasured as a damning proof of the Imperial perjury.

From this it may be gathered that Macedonius regarded himself as the bulwark of pure orthodoxy, although his enemies accused him of inclining to the heresy of Nestorius ; but on so dangerous a sea of controversy, where the line of true belief was invisible as the equator itself, it is rash and unnecessary to venture. If a complete and microscopic comprehension of the mysterious duality of Christ be indeed essential to salvation, then the state of many a good, simple-minded Christian must be more than perilous ; and if by God's mercy it be not, we shall act wisely in leaving the subject to those unquiet intellects which delight in coining difficulties and elaborating solutions. The curious reader is at liberty to bewilder himself by the contemplation of the Saviour as existing in, by, from, or of two natures (for over these prepositions was the world convulsed), but for the purpose of this tale sufficient has here been said.

There is, however, but little doubt that the oath which Anastasius was reluctantly induced to sign in order to obtain power, and of which his reign was a continuous violation, was a constant thorn in his side.

As there are some kinds of stone which harden

by exposure to the atmosphere, and as iron becomes tougher by incessant hammering, so all the innate stubbornness of the man was brought to the surface by the perpetual attacks to which empire exposed him, and a harmless sectarian, naturally amiable and temperate, was transformed into a violent bigot, in whose eyes meanness, injustice, and oppression became venial means of enforcing his peculiar tenets.

* * * * *

Blue and Green, sapphire and emerald!—the livery of the universe; the hues of earth and air, of sea and sky and land; of wood and plain and lake and distant mountain, of the river and its bank, of the violet and its leaves; omnipresent, eternal! the colours which nature delights in combining, and art has pronounced inharmonious! Read this tale of a time when their antagonism betokened more misery to mankind than ever did the black flag of the corsair, the red badge of revolution, or the yellow ensign of the pestilence.

BOOK I.



CHAPTER I.

FATHER AND DAUGHTER.

ONE Sunday morning in the year of our Lord five hundred and fourteen, before the bray of trumpet and clang of gong (for church bells were not yet in use) began to summon the inhabitants of Constantinople to divine service, Maria, the daughter of Proclus the Prefect, sat by the open casement of her chamber listening for the sound of the carriage which was to take her to church.

It is with much pleasure that I commence my story with the introduction of this young lady; for although she plays but a subordinate part in its pages, and I cannot claim for her any special development of character, I can guarantee her to be perfectly well brought up and educated according to the idea of the times, and to behave throughout with strict propriety.

It must be understood that it is something to be able to affirm this. I am writing of an age abound-

ing in action and colour, full of unlikely facts and anomalous realities, the annals of which are probably the most romantic that the history of the world can produce; but an age certainly not prolific of what we should term in these days well-conducted people. No doubt they existed, as they always have, and as they ever will exist in every community, however dissolute and degenerate, but as a rule they passed away and made but little sign; virtue and modesty were constrained to be their own reward, and with here and there a shining exception, most of the prizes in life seem to have fallen to audacity and iniquity.

In reviewing the characters of my tale I have been alarmed to find how few of them have any pretensions to nice behaviour, such as might win the commendation of the respectable nineteenth century, and yet I engage to do all I can, consistently with truth, to soften, dilute, and mitigate the potent materials to the handling of which I have committed myself.

At the commencement of the sixth century the Eastern Empire was approaching the lowest stage of that degradation from which, under the rule of Justinian, it recovered for a brief period, only to be plunged again into the protracted weakness and viciousness of the Greek dynasty.

The hereditary claims of birth were not unnaturally ignored under a succession of rulers who

had themselves sprung from the ranks ; but this policy, instead of conduced, as might be expected, to the frequent elevation of individual merit, served only to establish a tyranny of wealth, impudence, and unscrupulousness. The licentiousness of the age was incredible. Effeminacy and ultra-refinement walked hand in hand with brutality and ostentation. The corruption of morals extended through all ranks of society, not always excepting the clergy, and the depravity of taste through every branch of art and literature, every phase of life, public or domestic. The severe beauty of the older forms of architecture was replaced by a bastard system abounding in feeble curves and florid ornament, and the elegant simplicity of the earlier writers by pleonastic declamation.

On the stage nothing would go down except coarse burlesque or gorgeous spectacle—the grosser the wit the greater was the enjoyment of the audience—while splendid scenery and naked actresses were the most certain aids to managerial success. The women of the upper classes delighted in false hair, paint, and extravagant costume ; intrigue was fashionable, and divorce ridiculously easy. The men were addicted to magnificent clothes, jewellery, perfumes, and warm baths ; their chief recreations, besides the theatre, were gambling, betting, and racing. The army had degenerated into a compound of spiritless citizens and turbulent mer-

cenaries, equally unserviceable at need, and the long lines of fortifications by which the Emperors vainly sought to protect the neighbourhood of Constantinople bore witness to the hopeless incapacity of the troops. And over the chaotic hideousness of this state of things was cast from the throne a delusive glare of magnificence and power. The servile Byzantines delighted to worship the outward symbols and to endure the pitiful despotism of a sovereignty which was impotent to control the violence of a Faction, or to assert its dignity against the insolence of a barbarian; their ears were satisfied by the sound and their eyes by the semblance of majesty, and the titles and honours due to divinity were eagerly lavished upon a gilded puppet.

I trust that my readers who have got thus far will not be daunted by this digression, this post-initial preface, and lay down the volume with the indignant query, “Why write of such an age?”

I plead its marvellous romance. At no other period of equal civilization have the eccentricities of fortune been illustrated by so many and so extraordinary examples; no other period, not being fabulous, can boast of such a wealth of dramatic incident, or present so many personages, the story of whose lives utterly confounds all the ordinary chances of human existence. Whether I can so depict this age as to interest modern readers,

whether I can properly delineate it with all its strange resemblance to our own times and its special characteristics—its horrors, passions, and intrigues, its many vices and its rare virtues—is another question, but I cannot refrain from the experiment. My chief fear is that the records of those days are so replete with genuine romance that the fiction I have grounded on them may only blur their outlines without increasing their interest; my chief hope, that there are many readers for whom they may possess the charm of being not too familiar.

I have selected a time when a transient gleam of better days began to dawn upon the Eastern Empire; my pet hero at least may, I trust, be found blameless, and the story as a whole, if written without special purpose, not entirely devoid of moral. Now too, if ever, does some interest belong to the memory of the first war that was ever waged in the name of religion, and of which the theatre was the region between the Danube and Constantinople.

I repeat, then, that it gives me sincere satisfaction to introduce at the outset my commonplace and possibly insipid sub-heroine, this young lady of seventeen, as she sat in her own bower of innocence waiting for the carriage to take her to church; her small, daintily gloved hands crossed over the embroidered cover of the missal which lay in her

lap, and a look of rather precocious sedateness on her faultless features and in her demure brown eyes.

She made a pleasant picture as she sat there, and there was reason enough for the smile of gratification which lit up the grave features of her father as he entered the room.

“Dressed for church already, my dear?” said the tall Prefect, as he stooped to kiss the young girl’s serene brow. “That’s well; you are early to-day. How are you going?”

“The Lady Juliana calls for me,” replied Maria; “she begged me to be ready in good time, as there was likely to be a crowd.”

“Do you go as usual to her own church of the Deipara?”

“No, father; to-day we go to St. Sophia.”

The Prefect’s face became grave again. “I am sorry,” he said, “that the Lady Juliana should have selected St. Sophia. The Emperor, I grieve to say, has renewed the mandate for the amended Trisagion to be chanted there this morning, and there is likely to be a commotion.”

“So the Lady Juliana told me, father; but she said there was the greater reason for all good Catholics to support the Patriarch in the moment of trial.”

“A very proper feeling, no doubt,” said Proclus; but his tone was very dubious.

“ Is she not right, father ? ” asked Maria, as the Prefect hesitated.

“ It is not for me,” replied Proclus, “ to criticize the conduct of so earnest and pious a lady, or to question its propriety ; but I repeat that I am sorry you are to accompany her, my child. In permitting you so frequently to be her companion, not only to church, but to many other places, I accord to you a freedom which falls to the lot of few girls. My friends, indeed, blame me, but I have great confidence both in her and you. At the same time there is a vast difference between a lady in her position—of royal extraction, the wife of one of our most influential men, herself taking a leading part in the religious and political questions of the day—and my little daughter, who, I sincerely hope, may never be mixed up with these unfortunate dissensions.”

“ There is indeed a difference,” assented Maria, with suspicious meekness ; “ I could only hope to imitate the Lady Juliana at a great distance.”

“ There is no absolute reason, my dear,” said her father, with some warmth, “ why you should try to imitate her at all. Be your own dear self, and I shall be content.”

“ But have I not heard you say, father,” asked Maria, rather argumentatively, “ how admirable a person she is, and what a pattern to all Christians ? ”

“Ah—hem,” hesitated the Prefect, a little taken aback, “it is quite possible I may have said so, and with truth. There can be but one opinion as to her piety and sincerity, her charities and good works. A lady who devotes a great portion of her wealth to the building of churches, schools, hospitals, and the like, and who strenuously maintains the cause of orthodoxy, is of course admirable. But what I wish you to see, Maria, is that her prominent position places her, so to speak, beyond imitation, and that many things which are becoming in her, and are even exacted by that position, may not be so in other people.”

“There can at least be nothing wrong,” pleaded Maria, “in sharing her anxiety for the welfare of the Church.”

“Certainly not,” said Proclus; “but as the Patriarch cannot possibly stand in need of my little girl’s personal support, your prayers for the welfare of the Church would be more easily offered amidst a less excited congregation than that which is likely to fill St. Sophia to-day. But there, I have no wish to say more; you have promised to go with the Lady Juliana—that is sufficient. She takes a great interest in you, and I think I prove my complete confidence in her. In one respect, at least,” he continued, smiling, “you have not hitherto aspired to imitate your idol—and may I add, I hope you never will?—in your dress,” and

the father glanced approvingly at the elegant simplicity of his daughter's attire ; "there, too, I have no doubt that it is her position which entails so much display, but I wish it were not necessary."

"My dear father," exclaimed Maria, opening wide her brown eyes, "even were I not unmarried I could never venture to copy the magnificence of the Lady Juliana ; but you must not blame her for it."

"I have no intention of blaming her, my dear," said Proclus ; "I merely expressed a wish——"

"She has often explained to me," interrupted the obstinate little lady, "her views on that subject. She says that people dress themselves as splendidly as they can for the theatres and spectacles, for drives and visits, and can any of these be so worthy of honour as the house of God?"

"Ah, well," murmured the Prefect, with a sigh, "possibly I am no judge of such matters."

"She also observed," persisted Maria, "that whenever God has condescended to reveal His will on this point, He has always ordained and sanctioned the utmost splendour in His worship, and she argues that those who have the privilege of assisting may at least humbly endeavour to assimilate themselves to the rite."

It was the Prefect's turn to open his eyes. "She has at least taught you to express an opinion, my child," he said. "Ah, that 'humbly' is the diffi-

culty. I do not question the Lady Juliana's pious motives, but of this I am sure, that they are not the motives of the majority of grand ladies who fill the gallery of St. Sophia, or any other fashionable church in Constantinople. I acknowledge the zeal and sincerity of your patroness, and believe she does all in her power to discourage the irreverent behaviour of others, but I cannot help thinking a little moderation in dress and ornament would be more to the point. What is it the apostle says about outward adorning?"

"The Lady Juliana," said Maria, stiffly, "holds that the minor rules of conduct which were laid down for the guidance of the infant Church are not binding in all their strictness on Christians of the present day."

"Possibly not," said the Prefect, with a look of real annoyance; "the doctrine is at all events very convenient; but is that a reason for rushing into the other extreme? Is it possible, for instance, that paint, false hair, antimony, rouge, gold-dust, what not, can by any specious argument be construed as signs of reverence? Are our ladies one whit better now than when Chrysostom scolded them for appearing in church with eyebrows like a sooty kettle, cheeks like whitened sepulchres, and mouths like that of a bear reeking with gore?—not pretty similes, I confess, but very much to the purpose. And then those strong words of his: 'Who

can weep for her sins when the tears wash her face bare and leave furrows on her skin? With what trust can faces be lifted towards heaven which the Maker cannot recognize as His own handiwork? I mention no names, but specimens of such self-manufacture would not be difficult to find this morning, without going——”

But here the Prefect stopped suddenly, for Maria shook her pretty head and pouted without answering, and a delicate flush spread over the pure alabaster of her complexion.

“Come,” said Proclus, coaxingly, as he stroked her bright cheek, “I have said too much. I must not be severe on those who are kind to my darling. Heaven be praised, not Chrysostom himself, were he amongst us now, could be ought but golden-mouthed for her, or cast the least suspicion on her roses. May it ever be so! And now, my dear child, listen. I came here to speak to you on a very different subject, and thanks to your being ready so early there may still be time before the Lady Juliana arrives. As it is a serious matter, involving your future happiness, there will be little harm on your meditating upon it in church and praying for Divine guidance.”

Maria looked up inquiringly in her father’s face.

“Last night,” continued Proclus, “I was petitioned for your hand in marriage.”

“Father!”

“It is true; and by one who, thanks to the Lady Juliana and the unusual liberty you enjoy, is by no means a stranger to you—whom you have seen and spoken with far more frequently than the majority of our young ladies see their husbands before marriage, so that you are able yourself to entertain an opinion as to his merits or the contrary—I mean Count Hypatius, the nephew of Cæsar and son of Secundianus.”

The lovely flush deepened again on the young girl’s cheek as she exclaimed—

“The Count Hypatius wishes to marry me!”

“Even so, my darling,” answered the Prefect, gazing fondly at her. “Is the announcement so very unexpected, or his choice so very extraordinary?”

“And what—what answer did you give, dear father?” asked Maria, timidly, casting down her eyes.

“My dear,” said the Prefect, “I answered like an old diplomatist, and committed myself to nothing. I wished to speak to you. It is my intention to do so very plainly, Maria. You are a girl of great sense, and will fully understand and appreciate my remarks. To the Count himself it is difficult to find a serious objection. He is rich, handsome, and of an excellent age—neither too young nor too old; he is gay and genial, without being recklessly dissipated, like too many of our

young noblemen. If he has not a very conspicuous intellect, he is sufficiently talented and accomplished. He has proved himself a gallant soldier, and sustains his duties at court admirably. Ah! I see his praises gratify you," said Proclus, slyly, as he watched his daughter's glowing cheek. "Let us find something to his disadvantage. Let me see. In the first place he is a leader among the Greens, whereas my little girl's sympathies are strongly with the Blues. That is rather dangerous, is it not?"

"Not in the least," pouted Maria. "Now you are not serious."

"God knows," said the Prefect, shaking his head, "it is a serious matter enough in some families; but perhaps, my dear, you look to averting domestic dissension by going over to the enemy, or possibly by converting the Count—eh?"

"I expect the Lady Juliana every minute," answered Maria, piteously.

"True, my child. We will pass the point. Seriously, then, the Count's chief fault is irresolution—a want of decision, which renders him liable to be carried away by the feeling of the moment, and to be beguiled by the advice and example of others, and which, in a degree, neutralizes his generous impulses; perhaps I should say, might do so under unfortunate circumstances. You smile, Maria; you think me hypercritical. I have a right

to be so where my child is concerned. Still I allow that, for position and fortune and character, the match is one which might excite the envy of any girl or parent in Constantinople. I will go further, and say that it is magnificent; in the present state of affairs, the grandest alliance for a subject that the Empire of the East can offer."

"It is indeed a great honour," said Maria, thoughtfully.

"There can be no doubt of it," continued Proclus. "Although the family of Anastasius can boast no blood equal to the old Roman current which flows in our veins, Hypatius is none the less the nephew of an Emperor; certainly the heir to a great portion of his wealth, possibly his successor on the throne. There are thousands in the city who would take this view of the case, and hail you, my dear child, as a future Empress; but, myself, I am not among the number."

Maria looked up, startled at this abrupt declaration. "You do not believe in the possibility?" she exclaimed.

"In the bare possibility, yes; in the probability, not at all. I told you I intended to speak openly, Maria. My firm belief is—and remember this is between ourselves—that on the death of Cæsar the purple will not descend to any of his family. It would be useless to give my reasons, but such is my unalterable conviction."

“To whom, then, do you think that it will descend?”

“It is better to leave that question unanswered. Cæsar undoubtedly designs Hypatius as his successor. He may never be so. Were that all, my mind would be at ease. If I could be assured that my dear child would remain the wife of a Patrician, honoured, wealthy, and happy, I would gladly, most gladly, relinquish all dreams of her Imperial splendour; but there lies my cause for anxiety. Neither the Count nor his brother Pompey can ever divest themselves of the distinction of being the nephews of an Emperor; it must cling to them through life. Such a distinction is always dangerous, often fatal; it is seldom that the surviving members of one dynasty do not become criminal in the eyes of the next.”

“I understand you, father,” said Maria with animation. “But do they not generally make themselves so? Supposing your views to be correct, might not the Count be prudent? With you as his friend and counsellor, might he not resign himself to circumstances, forego ambition, and be content to forget his connection with the throne? Surely it cannot be so difficult.”

“Especially with a sweet little wife at his elbow to assist him,” said Proclus, smiling. “You are a true woman, Maria. Ah, my darling! let him ever so much try to forget it, there will always be plenty,

both friends and enemies, to remember it for him. I am an old man, my dear ; my friendship and counsel will not be of service to any one for very much longer. Moreover, the one weakness which I have pointed out in the Count's character is the most fatal he could possess, under the circumstances."

"My dear father, I must say that you are not encouraging," said the young girl, warmly.

"It is my duty not to be too sanguine," answered Proclus, sadly. "I wish you to understand why an old statesman, who is also a loving father, views with some distrust a marriage which would drive half Constantinople wild with envy."

Maria rose, drew her father down into the seat she had quitted, perched herself on his knee, and twined her arms round his neck. "Dearest father," she cooed, "I know how you love me, and how wise and experienced you are ; but are you not purposely taking an over-gloomy view of matters ? I will do whatever you wish—tell me. Let us forget the question of my becoming an Empress. I don't care— Hush !" she said, laying her small hand on the Prefect's mouth. "I will have no wicked sarcasms ; but I think—I should like—to be—his wife." And, letting these last words creep out in a half-frightened whisper, the little lady nestled her blushing face into the folds of the prefected toga.

Proclus sighed as he tenderly stroked her hair. "I confess I was prepared for that admission," he said, "and I do not wonder at it; but you must still listen, my child, to what I have to say. So lift up your head, or you will not be fit to be seen in church."

Thus appealed to, Maria raised her glowing face, plumed herself for a moment, and sat upright, all attention.

"The Emperor," said Proclus, "has done us the honour to approve this marriage; and you are aware, Maria, that the Imperial approval is something very like a command. Ah! silly child, your eyes brighten! Nevertheless, I warn you, my dear, that in spite of this and your own avowal, I am going to be at once rebellious and hard-hearted enough to use the influence which my long services have given me towards preventing its taking place, for some time at least, and you must listen patiently to my reasons."

"I will indeed, father," said Maria, kissing him and folding her hands sedately.

"The course which Cæsar thinks fit to pursue in religious matters," continued the Prefect, "contrary to the advice of his faithful counsellors, cannot fail to produce fresh commotions in the city, and if persisted in, must, I fear, lead to—war."

"War!" exclaimed Maria, horror-struck; "to war?"

“Alas! yes, my child! to nothing else—civil war. I need not caution you again that such political matters as I am obliged to mention must never pass your lips. In spite of the Lady Juliana, you can hold your tongue when you choose; so be discreet. Yes, there are those who will not sit by and see the Patriarch and the Catholics oppressed, the Pope set at defiance, and the Act of Chalcedon treated as waste-paper.”

“But war between Christians, for the sake of religion!” said Maria. “How horrible!”

“Horrible indeed, my child, but not the less imminent; and it is to be feared that, if men once learn the trick of religious warfare, they are not likely to forget it. Perhaps, indeed, open hostility and an appeal to arms, dreadful as they appear, are preferable to the bitter hate, the vile intrigue, and atrocious deeds which have disgraced our Church for many a long year. See now, Maria; without being versed in politics, you cannot fail to catch the significance of what I tell you—to understand what vital changes may be wrought in a few months by such a contingency as civil war. I am the devoted servant of Cæsar; my life and abilities shall ever be at his disposal, but I cannot blind myself to his perverseness and folly. I see the danger which menaces him, the flashes of the coming tempest, and I hear the distant mutter of the thunder; but although I freely offer myself

as a shelter to my sovereign, I will not, so help me God ! permit my dearest to involve herself deliberately in possible misery and ruin. At the first outbreak the Count will be called upon to take the field. If he return triumphant, he has the greater claim on your admiration ; if not, it is better you should mourn for the disgrace or death of an acquaintance—for as yet he is scarcely more—than of a husband."

This terrible peroration, spoken with such force and decision that there was no gainsaying it, left poor Maria with no argument but that of tears, to which she at once resorted, and sobbed piteously.

"Calm yourself, my child," said the Prefect ; "you must not let the Lady Juliana find you with red eyes. I have shown you the dark side of the question, as it was my duty to do ; and now you may console yourself by meditating on the brighter. All may go well. His Majesty may be inspired, by God's blessing, to take a more tolerant view of the religious controversy, and so regain the love and confidence of his people. If the worst come, I cannot but believe that loyalty must triumph over treason and rebellion. In any case, all I stipulate for is a reasonable delay in the arrangement of this marriage, and that I mean to have ; any objection on your part will be neither filial nor maidenlike."

With these conclusive words the Prefect kissed

his daughter again, and gave signs of a desire to rise. As these were ineffectual, and the young lady still sobbed without moving, he extricated himself by a dexterous sidelong movement, evidently the result of considerable practice, and stood up.

“Now dry your eyes, Maria ; the Lady Juliana must be here directly. I have no doubt that she will be amply provided with attendants—her equipage is seldom deficient in that respect—but in case of accidents, I have ordered a dozen of our runners to follow you ; so you will be well protected.”

“Will you not come with us yourself, father ?” asked Maria, rising in her turn and resorting to a mirror by the window.

“I am sorry I cannot, my child. I have by no means a pleasant task before me ; I am going to call on our neighbour Malchus, whose temper is never angelic, and who is at present confined to the house by a fit of the gout.”

“Then why do you go ?” asked Maria, slyly using a puff to her eyes.

“To intercede for his unfortunate nephew, Sittas. He is engaged to be married, as I believe you know, to Vivia Marcella ; but he is a sad scamp, I am afraid, and has got terribly into debt and all kinds of trouble. He might still be saved, though, from going to the dogs altogether, if his uncle would listen to reason. Malchus is enormously rich.”

“Horrid old man !” exclaimed Maria. “Do

you know, the Lady Juliana declares that he wants to marry Vivia himself ! ”

“ Humph ! so your ears have not been spared that pretty bit of scandal. The Lady Juliana seems to take you a good deal into her confidence, my dear.”

“ But that is nothing to the character she gives the nephew,” continued Maria. “ They say, amongst other dreadful things, that he is an atheist,” she added, dropping her voice with awe.

“ Ah, I dare say ; every one will have a stone to cast at him now he is down,” said Proclus. “ They never found out these dreadful things when he had the run of all the best houses in the city. Poor lad ! I knew his father well, and have always had a fancy for him ; in spite of his follies he is a fine, high-spirited fellow, and if we can save him I don’t despair of his making a figure in the world yet. I hope he will do nothing desperate.”

At this point a servant in gorgeous livery entered, and with a deep obeisance said—

“ Her Highness Juliana Patricia attends my lady.”

“ Off with you, my dear,” said the Prefect ; and with an embrace father and daughter separated.

CHAPTER II.

ARCADES AMBO.

WHILE the gilded coach of Juliana Patricia is rolling towards St. Sophia with that great lady and her young friend, and the kind-hearted Prefect is setting out to attempt the thankless task of softening the stony heart of Malchus towards his unfortunate nephew, we shall have time to scrape a hasty acquaintance with the reprobate himself by entering the gateway of a villa of charming exterior, partially concealed amid an odorous thicket of flowering shrubs, and overshadowed by tall palms and plane trees ; passing through the spacious open court and pillared entrance-hall beyond—the art treasures of which, both in paint and marble, are strongly suggestive of Anacreon and Catullus—traversing two or three dim luxurious chambers, and finally penetrating to a delicious sanctum, where the windows open on to a brilliant flower-garden with a peep of blue waters and hazy

mountains, and are protected from the external glare by a colonnade of pale green Laconian marble, fitted with awnings of a delicate rose tint, and overrun by the curbed luxuriance of broad-leaved creepers and climbing roses.

Here we shall find a singularly handsome young man, the owner of this paradise, lying on a sofa in an embroidered dressing-robe, and sipping a cooling beverage after his morning's bath, while he listens to the torrent of excited words which issues from the lips of another young gentleman, handsome also in a less degree, who, pale and dishevelled, declaiming and gesticulating, is striding up and down the apartment, and thereby rapidly bringing his person to the same uncomfortable temperature as his mind.

“I know I have been extravagant—recklessly so,” he shouts, as though by raising his voice he hoped to terrify his conscience into accepting his self-excuses, “but he has always led me to believe myself his heir. He is rolling in wealth. He knew well that my private fortune was insignificant; he must have understood that I could not possibly live as I have been living, under his very nose, on the allowance he made me. It was a handsome one, I will not deny it, but not sufficient for my style of doing things. He never gave me a word of warning. It would have been so easy to say, ‘My dear nephew, I do not know what other resources

you may have, but if you are running into debt you must not expect me to pay.' That would have been all fair, but he never did; I say, on the contrary, he encouraged me, curse him!"

"My dear Sittas," entreated the occupant of the sofa in a piteous tone, when at length he was able to slip in a remonstrance, "for Heaven's sake sit down and compose yourself; it is distressing to see you! Sit down, I beseech you, and let us look matters quietly in the face. This is so unlike you."

"It is easy to talk, Ecebolus," rejoined the other, dashing himself down among the cushions of a divan. "I feel as if I was going mad."

"Most probably you will if you don't control your passion," said his friend, quietly—"or break a blood-vessel, or fall down in a fit, or do something equally unpleasant. Here, drink some of this, and listen to me calmly for a few minutes. First tell me, is there no chance of your uncle relenting?"

"Not the very smallest," replied Sittas. "He has given orders that I am to be turned out by force if I dare to present myself again at his house; by force, mark you! Damnation! we'll try that; I'll go back there at once."

"You will do nothing so absurd," said Ecebolus. "Bah! what satisfaction will it be to seriously injure a few poor devils of slaves who must obey orders, and in the end to be pitched, neck and crop,

into the street, foaming at the mouth and with your clothes in rags—a pretty spectacle for the elect on their way to church ! ”

“ Damn the elect,” growled Sittas, sulkily.

“ If you please,” said Ecebolus, “ though they say it’s impossible. But about your uncle ; I admit he has behaved badly. Now, pray, let me speak ; you have been abusing him steadily for the last half-hour, may I not have my turn ? He certainly ought to have warned you. His conduct is so remarkable that one would suspect a strong motive for it ; ” and here the speaker looked earnestly at Sittas. “ You undoubtedly have been extravagant,” he continued, finding that his companion took no notice of his last remark, “ but scarcely more so than was warranted by your expectations. As for your general conduct, it has been much on a par with that of others, your friends and constant associates, as your uncle well knew—with this difference, that you have contracted an honourable engagement with a young lady eminently charming, virtuous, and wealthy ; which, regarding my selection of epithets as a whole, is more than can be said of any of us.”

“ The devil ! ” cried Sittas ; “ that is the real sting of it. Had I only been able to hold on a little longer, I should have been safe and—and united to the girl I love.”

At this sentimental after-thought Ecebolus could

not repress a smile, which, catching his friend's eye, he cleverly converted into a yawn.

"And now," exclaimed Sittas, rising to pace the room again like a wild beast in its cage, "I feel that I love her more than ever."

"That is always the case, I fancy; one never thoroughly appreciates anything until one has lost or is going to lose it."

Sittas stopped with a fierce look at the speaker, but in the young man's face, serene and beautiful as the morning, he could detect no expression to back the latent sneer of his words. "The dear girl knew of all my difficulties," he continued, "and we agreed that, once married, I could retrench and pay off everything."

"It is sad," remarked Ecebolum, dryly, "that so promising a basket of eggs should be smashed,—as I fear it is?"

"Hopelessly. Her guardian has learnt everything from Malchus—they are close friends, curse them both!—and Vivia cannot marry without his consent?"

"Then, if you will not be savage with me for saying so, we will dismiss the young lady from the question—for the present. I do not know the extent of your liabilities, but I was about to propose that I should try to find a sum sufficient to take up your bonds, and so relieve you from immediate pressure, by becoming your principal creditor; and

if you liked, you and your intended could enter into some engagement to repay me by instalments. Stop a minute, if you please—don't thank me for nothing; you see the thing is impossible."

"But that does not make your intention the less kind."

"Never mind the intention, let us come to something practical. Now, see here, Sittas; ever since my arrival in the city you and I have been the best of friends—there has never been the ghost of an unpleasantness between us; that, I think, is sufficiently proved by your coming here to vent your first blast of indignation, like a very volcano, and the exemplary way in which I have endured the eruption. Good. I am tolerably rich, you know; one of these days, when the dear old man retires from business and life together, I shall be richer. I am an only child, and can do pretty much as I like. It is astounding, and at the same time a merciful dispensation, how it gratifies a man who has toiled all his life at amassing wealth to watch his offspring dispensing the same for the benefit of society. Ah! if your uncle, Sittas, had only made his fortune in trade! But to come to the point—how much do you require? Let me lend it to you, and repay me at your leisure, when something turns up, or, in default of that, not at all. Now, what is the amount? Let me see that you are really my friend." And at the conclusion of this

long speech, delivered with a charm of voice and manner inexpressibly winning, the young Adonis sank languidly back upon his couch and refreshed himself from the goblet beside him.

The pale features of Sittas worked painfully as he realized the import of his friend's words, and for some awkward moments his ready tongue failed him altogether; at last he stepped up to the young man, clasped his hand in both of his own, and spoke in a voice broken by emotion—

“ My dear, generous friend! I am not often thankful for anything, but if there be a power which directs the actions of men, I thank that power for sending me here this morning. I came, I confess, half mad with rage and despair, to find some one who would listen to my grievances; it is such a relief; with perhaps some after-thought of saying farewell to you, if to no one else. In spite of my bluster, my opinion of myself was mean enough half an hour ago, I do assure you. Your words have made a new man of me. Don't imagine for one instant that I am going to avail myself of your noble offer, but you cannot tell how it lifts a man out of the mire to find himself thought worthy of such a thing. I shall never despise myself again. I owe you eternal gratitude, Ecebolus, but I cannot accept your proposal.”

“ Don't decide in a hurry, Sittas,” said Ecebolus, quietly. “ Give yourself time for reflection, and,

above all, be candid in stating the amount of your debts. In helping you I shall not have to inconvenience myself; if I have not sufficient cash at hand, my credit is good at Alexander's. I can do without the Jews; or I will send a messenger off to Tyre this instant."

" My dear friend, believe me, I appreciate your thorough-going generosity, but I implore you not to tempt me any more. It is impossible that I can accept your offer. I am not overburdened with scruples, but I have one or two still left; let me retain them. To tell you the truth, I had made all arrangements for leaving the city before I came here. My faithful Scipio—what a jewel he is! I wish you would take him when I am gone—has discovered that there is a merchant vessel sailing for Anchialus this morning. My baggage ought to be shipped by this time, and the boat which brought me to your garden steps can take me on board."

" So you refuse to let me assist you, Sittas? I think you are wrong. No one need know anything of our arrangements; let them gabble and conjecture as much as they please, that will soon pass. After a time your uncle may relent, and then your marriage will follow. We shall all be where we were before, and have many a pleasant time together, until I retire to the provinces myself. You, of course, will have to settle down into a respectable *paterfamilias*; but still——"

“ Say no more, Ecebolum, I entreat you. I feel that it is all over in that quarter. Vivia’s guardian will never consent now that he knows all, and my uncle is hopelessly exasperated ; words passed between us this morning which I don’t care to repeat. No, nothing is left but to make a bolt of it.”

“ And what on earth will you do at Anchialus ? ”

“ Try the waters, and throw pebbles into the sea, until I get a chance of moving on.”

“ And get snapped up by the barbarians and carried into Cimmerian night.”

“ The best thing that could happen to me. I should be well out of the way then. There is not much chance of any one trying to ransom me. I beg of you, as a friend, don’t do it, if you have the opportunity. Besides, I may come out in a new line.”

“ As what ? scullion to a Chagan ? ”

“ As a champion of the true Catholic faith.”

“ That will be a new line with a vengeance. How do you propose to testify ? ”

“ By the sword. If these rumours about Vitalian have any truth in them—they say he is furious about the false accusation brought against Mace-donius—and if Cæsar makes a fool of himself again, which is almost a certainty, there is likely before long to be a ferment in the Danubian provinces. You know what happens on such occasions ; there is

a chance of that which is worthless rising to the top."

"Are you serious?"

"Never more so. I have always thought I should enjoy a campaign: a troop of irregular cavalry would suit me exactly. You know that I have Seythian blood in my veins."

"I did not. But I congratulate you. How did it get there?"

"My grandmother was a niece of Prince Aspar, whose great-grandson is Vitalian, so that I claim cousinship with the rebellious Count himself."

"And look to making the most of the claim?"

"Decidedly. Moreover, I have a gold torque, which came to me from my grandmother. As soon as I get far enough north, I shall wear it. It may insure the respect of the barbarians."

"It is more likely to insure their cutting your throat. Then, by a remote possibility, you may re-enter Constantinople in the character of a conqueror."

"I will take the longest odds about it."

"We shall be enemies in that case. You know I always hold by the reigning powers."

"In name, possibly; in heart, never. Besides, being a peaceful citizen, you count as neutral."

"But it is by the plunder of us peaceful citizens that you must pay your irregular cavalry. My dear Seythian, I beg of you to take the money now, and spare my household gods in the future."

“Rest assured, sir,” said Sittas, with mock gravity, “I shall give the strictest orders that your property is to be held sacred.”

“Ah, well,” laughed Ecebolus, “you are more like your old self now. Come, Sittas, give up this wild notion. Mortgage your grandmother’s torque and the Scythian cousinship to me, and one of these days we’ll go off together, start afresh as barbarian kings, and found an asylum for the oppressed Gentile. I implore you to reconsider your decision.”

“Not for an instant. Dear friend, my mind is quite made up. I will ask one favour of you. I have written this letter to Vivia; will you charge yourself with delivering it?”

“I will, and ask a favour in my turn. How are you provided with ready cash? Let me at least supply you with that; you cannot refuse——”

“Once more, a thousand thanks. I have more than I require, or deserve. You know that I won considerably over a thousand gold-pieces the last night at the Count’s. I have even been virtuous enough to pay up my household expenses. Debts of honour I have none. The Jews and tradespeople must wait; I am sorry for the latter. And now, dear friend, farewell. May every good fortune attend you. I shall never forget your splendid offer; whether I shall ever be able to prove my gratitude is another matter. We may never meet again. Once more, farewell, farewell.”

And with a parting grasp of the hand and something of a quiver in his lip, Sittas turned and passed out into the garden, and went slowly down through the brilliant sunshine and gay flowers to the steps of the portico where his boat was waiting.

Ecebolus stood looking after his retreating figure, with the letter in his hand.

“ Poor fellow ! ” he murmured, “ I am sorry to lose him ; and he has not yet learnt the cruellest part of it. Well, the blow to his love—no, I believe I am wrong—to his self-love, will be less severe by the time it reaches him. He has no suspicion of what half the city is babbling about, that his uncle and the girl’s guardian have arranged matters between them. As for her, she is not worth consideration. It is strange, though, how in matters of the kind those who are most concerned are the last to learn. Another merciful dispensation. Well, my part is clear, to deliver the letter, and cut the young lady in future ; and now that I am wide awake at this unearthly hour, what in the world am I to do ? I wonder if those rumours about war are true ? I have a great mind to go to church and hear all the gossip. There is no place like it ; it beats the Agora out and out. I will.”

Not long after Ecebolus had carried out this excellent resolution, Proclus, utterly baffled in his assault upon the implacability of Malchus, was issuing from that gentleman’s house in an unwonted state of personal excitement.

I fear I shall not have a great deal to say in favour of the two young profligates whose parting we have just witnessed. I hope, therefore, it will be remembered what an offer the one had the magnificence to make, as calmly as he would have proffered to his guest a glass of wine, and the other the magnanimity to refuse.

CHAPTER III.

THE AUGUSTEUM.

As Proclus anticipated, the Imperial order respecting the Trisagion had created a commotion, and the nucleus of the excitement was to be found in the Augusteum, a spacious square in the Twelfth Region of the city, one of the sides of which was occupied by the front of the palace, another by the church of St. Sophia.

Two groups of choristers, consisting of men and youths, and about equal in numbers, were preparing to enter the sacred precincts.

Under the system of the early Church the members of the choirs were recognized as filling an intermediate position between the genuine clergy and the laity; their ordination, if we may use the term, was effected without laying on of hands or any special ceremony; they were merely required to pledge themselves before the presbyter to the effect that they would obey their superiors, be punctual, well conducted, and devout, and sing with their hearts as well as their voices.

The two bands of these quasi-ecclesiastics which were assembled in front of St. Sophia were surrounded by a noisy, gesticulating crowd, and they themselves, far from exhibiting a demeanour consonant with the religious duties they were about to perform, stood confronting each other with scowling brows and faces inflamed with wrath.

Nor did the mob appear inclined to allow these hostile symptoms to subside, treating the affair much as if it were a cock-fight or combat of wild beasts arranged for its especial gratification. Cheers, groans, taunts, and hisses, shouts of disapprobation or applause, levelled either by name at individual members of the choir or the groups collectively, resounded on all sides. Knots of young men richly clad, after the fashion of the day, in flowing robes of silk or delicately embroidered linen, and attended by a train of slaves and pages who carried parasols, scent-bottles, fans, prayer-books, and cushions, and reflected the glory of their masters in their own glittering attire, lounged about the square and encouraged the proceedings by the laughter with which they greeted the rough witticisms and coarse merriment of the crowd. Sleek, steady-looking citizens, in garments of more sober cut and hue, assented with placid smiles. Stalwart ruffians, long-haired and deep-voiced, conspicuous by their scarves or badges of blue and green, the bullies of the Factions and the terror of

society in general, jostled and swaggered and bellowed among the press with the air of men who felt themselves masters of the situation ; and women, excited after their kind, screamed and chattered like jays, and eagerly strained on tiptoe to catch a glimpse of the rival choirs.

But the scene had also its serious aspect.

Tall monks might be seen gliding about the skirts of the throng, or thrusting their way into the midst, cursing or exhorting as the spirit moved them, and according to the cause they espoused.

“Cursed be ye,” shouted these apostles of discord, “cursed be ye, Manichæans, Monophysites, who make Christ a phantom ! May ye burn eternally ! Woe to the tyrant ! Cursed be he that beareth false witness against his neighbour ! Anathema to the blasphemer of the Holy Trinity ! Now is the day of trial ; let the faithful see to it !”

And with these utterances mingled the cry from the adherents of the Emperor :

“Cursed be they who divide Christ ! May they be divided by the sword ! Down with the Patriarch ! Anathema to the Nestorian ! Long live the pious Anastasius !”

But however earnest the intentions, and however strong the lungs of the Imperial partisans, a bystander could not fail to notice that their demonstration was but thin and feeble compared with that of their antagonists : whether deservedly or

undeservedly, the balance of clamour was immensely in favour of the Patriarch.

This significant fact did not escape the observation of our young friend Ecebolus, who had alighted from his luxurious carriage which remained waiting at the corner of the square, and stationed himself on the steps of the column opposite the church porch, a position from which he could see and hear all that passed without being actually mixed up with the disturbance.

So very sumptuous were the appointments of the deserted carriage, so rich the trappings of the splendid horses and the liveries of the attendants, that to stand and stare at them seemed to afford greater pleasure to many of the throng than to trouble themselves about the neighbouring hubbub; and a stranger might have gathered from their envious and admiring murmurs that the equipage belonged to the young Tyrian, a recent arrival in the city, whose wealth and good looks had placed him at once in the first ranks of Byzantine society.

Let us endeavour to gain an idea of his qualifications as he leans, gorgeous in silk, jewels, and embroidery, belted and shod with gold, against the marble pedestal.

The haughty grace of his attitude, the pose of the foot, the gesture of the arm, and the disdainful toss of the head as he looks down upon the howling

rabble, all indicate a man who has no small belief in and reliance on his personal gifts, and affects little sympathy with the vulgar emotions of those who are lower in the social scale. Glancing at his face, we feel at once that whatever airs he may choose to give himself, we shall not care to accuse him of conceit or vanity; there he carries a dispensation for all such offences.

Its beauty is of that rare, wondrous, and absolutely flawless class which we meet, if we are lucky, once or twice in a lifetime, which in these days we sometimes hear people attempt to describe by the phrase "divinely handsome." The expression is trite and feeble enough, but it is hard to find another which suggests better the almost superhuman and adorable comeliness which characterizes Ecebolus—a comeliness which disarms criticism and stultifies envy; in the presence of which it becomes invidious to speculate if the mental gifts are in harmony. We may note that the ear is small and well placed, that the curls, soft and glossy as a girl's, cluster round serene temples and a well-shaped forehead. But the question of intellect is really secondary; we are content to gaze on the perfection of feature and colouring, and thank Heaven for so glorious a revelation of humanity.

The complexion is a clear olive, faintly tinged with carmine on the cheeks. The eyes are large, dark, and glowing; their natural fringes driving

even the Byzantine ladies to despair, and causing a noticeable increase in their consumption of antimony. A first growth of silky beard shades without concealing the Antinous curves of the chin and mouth, the latter almost feminine in its tint and fulness, but manly in its sharp, imperious chiselling. Idle, sensual, shallow, coxcomb and rake—he may be all these; not even an aristocrat, but the son of a Tyrian silk merchant. He is a hero nevertheless, simply for his beauty; and on such base material grounds we must take him as he stands. Let us look sadly at that fair countenance, dreading the Nemesis which hangs over all superlative earthly blessings.

Before long he is observed by an individual in the crowd, who slowly works his way out and mounts the steps with a bow of recognition: a coarse, heavy-looking man, inclining to corpulence, although he is not yet thirty; with high cheekbones, flabby jaws, and strong, disagreeable features generally; but the face is full of power, and its plainness partially redeemed by a mobile brow, and a pair of hawk-bright eyes.

“John of Cappadocia, I declare,” said the young Tyrian with a pleasant smile, revealing a set of teeth white and glistening as the snowy Proconnesian marble against which he lounged; “the man of all others I want, who knows everything which occurs and the reason for it. Come here and

instruct my ignorance. What is the meaning of this excitement ? ”

“ It means, fair sir,” replied the new-comer, in a deliberate, full-toned voice, and after giving himself time to regain his breath and arrange his disordered dress, “ it means that Cæsar has commanded the Trisagion to be chanted to-day with the response which gives such dire offence to the orthodox, and causes them, as you may possibly have heard, to bellow the inquiry ‘ whether one of the Trinity has been crucified.’ Here is a copy of the mandate.”

“ And the result is this uproar ? ”

“ The immediate result was a split in the choir. Barsumas there, who owes everything to the Patriarch, and has a fellow-feeling for him besides, since the revelation of his Holiness’s incapacity for certain sins, refuses point-blank to pollute his orthodox lips with the blasphemy, and, as a matter of course, his rival Isidore takes the other side ; the rest of the vocal talent they divide pretty evenly among them.”

“ I see ; and therefore the service to-day is likely to be varied in a manner not contemplated by the ritual ? ”

“ Well, if those choristers do not fall foul of each other before it is over we may expect the millennium to-morrow.”

“ Just so ; and directly they do, the Patriarch

must answer for inciting his creatures to resist the Imperial mandate. In short, our pious Emperor, finding his Holiness is not to be got rid of by false accusations, has concocted another little scheme in the hope of goading him into committing himself somehow. Am I right ? ”

“ You speak rather imprudently, but I will not contradict you.”

“ A most ingenious trick, if not so dirty as the last ; but as for its succeeding in the end, the idea is absurd. Do but listen to those howling idiots ! There are twenty voices to one against the Emperor. All I am worth on the mitre against the crown ! ”

“ Take care,” said John, smiling ; “ it may come hard upon your Tyrian weavers, and I take it those useful slaves have their hands tolerably full as it is. Appearances are against Cæsar, I allow ; but compared with him this column is wax, and yonder jibbing mule a docile, tractable animal. He is about as likely to give in until he is driven to the last extremity, as the step on which we stand is to give way beneath us.”

“ The last extremity,” said Ecebolus, “ may mean to find himself without a crown, or possibly without a head to wear one. What utter insanity ! When the people have hardly got over their excitement about that pleasant little slander, to fan the embers into a flame by this fresh insult ! ”

“ It certainly seems injudicious.”



“And who shall say where the conflagration may end? There is a rumour abroad—and I, for one, believe it—that Macedonius has sent messengers to Vitalian, the Count of the Federates, and the Goth has sworn that if the Patriarch and the faithful be further molested, he will come with fifty thousand men at his back to ask the reason.”

“Likely enough; the Count is the soul of orthodoxy, and may think purple a becoming colour.”

“The Federates would follow him to a man, not to mention the Huns and Bulgarians. A pretty mess! Good God! that Cæsar should renounce the love of his people—for it was his once—and bring all this upon himself, for what?—to uphold a very phantom of doctrine, a distinction without a difference.”

“And yet real enough to set one half of the world longing to cut the throats of the other half. My brother is young and impulsive; he hardly makes sufficient allowance for conviction and conscience,” said the Cappadocian, with a sanctimonious twang.

“And if he did,” returned Ecebolus, “John of Cappadocia is hardly the man to understand it. But if it be conscience which prompts the head of the State to invent lies—and filthy lies, if we must tell the truth—about the head of the Church, the less of it the better. I neither practise nor preach

morality, but if that kind of low cunning comes of conscience, may I remain strictly unconscientious!"

"Let us, by all means. Ah! I have always maintained that you were too virtuous for this city—in some respects; but your Perfection forgets how long the prelate has been casting that extorted oath in the Imperial teeth."

"True, he holds the bond; they say that every Sunday his Holiness spreads it on the altar as Hezekiah did Sennacherib's letter. But in default of miracles, what possible value can attach to the mere paper when the agreement has been violated for years?"

"At eighty men have strange fancies," said John. "Perhaps Cæsar is visited at times by twinges of genuine remorse, and imagines that the destruction of the bond would cancel the oath. Possibly he is afraid that the Patriarch's weekly importunity may bear fruit some day. In all probability it will if his Holiness is persistent, and the death of an invalid octogenarian may be claimed as a special interposition. The moral at least is evident—swear to what you please, but never sign your name, or in your old age your conscience will be troublesome."

"Excellent advice," laughed Ecebolus; "but don't publish it in the Forum, or you will ruin your profession. One might indeed expect, without being sanguine, that at eighty, and eaten up

with disease, Cæsar would allow himself and his subjects a little repose, and be content to practise his Trisagion in private."

"And permit his enemy to triumph? You scarcely appreciate the character of Cæsar. My dear sir, if his Majesty and his Holiness should happen to meet hereafter in the same mansion of the blest, depend upon it there will be little repose for the rest of the saintly occupants."

"If they would but postpone their quarrel until then I should be content," said Ecebolus.

"Not expecting to be in that neighbourhood? You are right, though; these disturbances are becoming a nuisance."

"A nuisance! they are intolerable. There is no peace or quiet anywhere within the walls, and it seems probable that soon there will be none outside either. If Vitalian means coming, who or what is to stop him? As if monks and Factions were not sufficient curses without having a swarm of hulking barbarians about our ears, spoiling the crops, insulting the women, stealing the thoroughbreds, and ransacking every house in the neighbourhood!"

"Very pretty pickings they would find in the Villa Ecebolus," said John, sententiously. "I should like to assist at that job myself. But even if you abuse the clergy, I am surprised to hear you speak disrespectfully of the Factions."

“And why, pray? Of the two evils they are the worse, for one is driven in desperation and self-defence to adopt one colour or the other, whereas in religious matters it is possible to remain neutral.”

“Why? because you can afford to buy their services. It has been whispered that you aspire to office one of these days. Cræso-Adonis aims at being Lycurgus; good: while some poor devil who has only his merit to depend on is struggling vainly to get it recognized, you invest for your ambitious ends in a few hundreds—or with your resources say thousands—of gentlemen at large, who smooth your path to dignity as easily as a mower opens a lane through the long grass. *Tutum iter et patens, converso in pretium deo*—that is Ecebolo—much the same thing.”

“I thank you for the compliment and the simile—both sweet and poetical; I seem to hear the swish of the scythe. But if one must lay oneself out for corruption and bribery, give me the neater and quieter method of a good fat fee delicately insinuated into certain Illustrious pockets, and the next day out comes your appointment, and no questions asked.”

“Premising,” said John, “that the Factions, baulked of their due—from gentlemen like yourself, my dear Ecebolum, they have a right to expect something—do not turn round and, out of pure spite, support the deserving pauper; in which case,

after the Illustrious pocket has closed upon your fee, the Illustrious conscience is troubled by qualms, which result in your being thrown over."

"Most encouraging of advocates! Do you regale your clients with this style of discourse?"

"The question is not fair. Do you ask your excellent wine-merchant if he supplies all comers with the same pure vintage as yourself? Truth is rare and precious, and I reserve it for my friends."

"Then it must indeed be unsaleable; not suited, I imagine, to the Byzantine palate."

But here the attention of the pair was arrested by a sudden lull in the tumult, and a procession, headed by a body of monks, was seen slowly crossing the Augusteum in the direction of the church, while the notes of a solemn chant became audible.

"Here comes the Patriarch," exclaimed Ecebolus; "the sports are going to begin. Look at the sexless villain Barsumas; what a fiery red he is! How he swells and gasps like an overfed capon! He will have a fit if he tries to eclipse Isidore to-day."

"Ay," assented John; "the lean dog has the best of it. Shall we go in?"

"If you please; I have no better amusement to propose. I hope we shall get good places; the crush will be tremendous. We must stand something handsome for the doorkeeper."

CHAPTER IV.

TRISAGION.

LEAVING Ecebolus and the Cappadocian to fight their way into the church, we must return to the choristers whom we left facing each other at the entrance.

A greater contrast than existed between the men who played the most prominent part in the respective groups it is impossible to conceive.

Barsumas, the one to whom Ecebolus had called attention, was scarcely over the middle height, but monstrously stout. His small eyes were nearly concealed by the rolls of his smooth cheeks, and a double chin, also devoid of hair and approaching the dimensions of a goitre, supplied the place of a throat. As he stood there, crimson with indignation, puffing and blowing through a mouth which resembled a sea-anemone stuck in the middle of his face, the spectacle was at once painful and ludicrous.

On the other hand, Isidore was one of the tallest

men in the crowd, and apparently nothing but skin and bone. Looking at his narrow shoulders and chest, it was difficult to imagine from what region proceeded the rich volume of sound which divided with the high tenor, or rather falsetto, of Barsumas the favour of the church-going amateurs of Constantinople. On the parchment of the lower half of his face sprouted a stunted crop of black wire, which courtesy might term a beard. He appeared the only unexcited individual present, and his perfect coolness was as excellent a foil to the exasperation of his rival as his lean body to the mountain of flesh before him.

“Be careful, Barsumas,” he was saying with an irritating grin; “obese neutral, be careful; excite not yourself thus, or you will burst in trying to extract that cracked tinpot voice of yours, and blow your fellows to the four winds of heaven.”

“Vile Manichæan screech-owl!” retorted the angry eunuch, “I will outsing you until the notes squeak and rattle in your meagre chest like rats behind a wainscot.”

“For your own chest,” said Isidore, “it were doubtless ample enough to bring down the church, but your belly has risen in rebellion, and squeezed your frightened voice into your head.”

“Man! I defy thee and spit at thee,” gasped Barsumas, clenching his fat fist, and incapable of more.

"You lack breath for the latter," replied Isidore, calmly. "I could do the same by you if you were worth the trouble, but I cannot say 'man.'"

During these concluding sentences of their altercation the disputants, hustled and urged on by the crowd, had gradually edged nearer to each other, and it appeared imminent that a personal struggle would take the place of words, but at this critical juncture the procession of the Patriarch was seen approaching, and with a parting grin and gesture which drew a roar of applause from the crowd, Isidore turned on his heel, and, followed by his company, disappeared through the porch.

Said Dulcissimus, the boy-chorister, to his bosom friend Pudens, as the party of Barsumas prepared to follow, "There is no hurry, lad ; come with me," and gliding through the crowd he led the way to a corner of the building which was under repair, and where the ground was thickly strewn with chips of stone and marble.

"Nothing like being prepared," said the young scamp, as he rapidly filled his satchel with the fragments.

"Will there be a row, Dul, think you ?" asked his friend, following his example.

"Won't there ! " answered the boy ; "you wait and see. I saw the end of a stick peeping out of Isidore's tunic."

"And oh, if there is," exclaimed Pudens, hope-

fully, "won't I pay the old beggar out! He stole my knucks last Sunday for playing outside the church."

"Give it him," said the other, cordially; "but come on now, or we'll be late." And the two young rascals ran back to the vestry.

The body of the cathedral was closely packed with spectators. The term is used advisedly, for amongst that vast congregation there were probably not a dozen with whom the predominant feeling was not strong curiosity. For a while all other considerations, including even the rancour of religious dissension, were merged in the ludicrous aspect given to the question by the split in the choir and the grotesque hostility of the principal singers; and many who under other circumstances and on slighter grounds would have eagerly identified themselves with the quarrel and plunged into it heart and soul, were content and even anxious that it should be limited to its present sphere, and the sacred precincts assume the semblance of an amphitheatre, with choristers for gladiators, and the Patriarch as umpire.

And yet, had there been one present who could have diverted his mind from such ideas to serious contemplation, for him the scene could not have failed in impressive grandeur.

Although the old church of St. Sophia lacked the stately magnificence of the building which was later

erected on its ruins by Justinian, it was of ample size and noble proportions, and rich in internal decoration.

The imposing figure of the Patriarch installed in his robes beneath the canopy of state, the reverential files of attendant dignitaries, the white vestments of the choristers and acolytes, contrasted with the sombre array of monks and the many-coloured masses of the laity; the solemn light filtering through the lofty windows, the fragrant mist of incense curling about the treasures of the altar and the golden doves suspended above it; the sonorous accents of the Reader and the long slow chant which vibrated along the roof, together produced an effect which, even in a purely æsthetic light, might be expected to instil some solemn feelings into the most careless and unobservant.

Alas for the expectation! As a matter of fact, except among the lowest order of penitents, the contrite outcasts, who were permitted barely to cross the threshold and there lay stretched in ostentatious humiliation, there was not a sign of anything approaching to devotion, or even decorum. But instead; from below, in the body of the church, rose the incessant buzz of male voices in eager conversation, a running fire of comment, jest, and repartee, loud and undisguised laughter. And above, from the women's gallery—for in that inflammatory clime the wisdom of the authorities separated the

sexes—such a fluttering of fans and rustling of silks, such a continuous chirping and chattering as of birds in an aviary, such silvery bursts of cachinnation, and, moreover, such a display of jewellery, false hair and paint, of simpering and ogling, as might have made the boxes of a modern Parisian opera-house ashamed of their comparative solemnity and simplicity.

And through all this the service went on, until the moment arrived for chanting the Trisagion, or hymn to the Trinity. For this, the song of the cherubim in heaven, the Church of Constantinople claimed a mysterious revelation of some fifty years back, and a natural pride in the special favour thus miraculously accorded was probably the reason why the majority of the Byzantine clergy hotly resented the officious zeal of Peter, bishop of Antioch—surnamed the Fuller, from the trade he had exercised when a monk—who had thought fit to amend the Trisagion by substituting for the original response, “Holy Trinity, have mercy upon us!” the words, “Who wast crucified for us, have mercy upon us!” The act may have been presumptuous in a mortal, even though he were a bishop, but the alteration was dictated by extreme devotion, and only by wilful misinterpretation could the new response be found guilty of the grave charge brought against it, that of imputing passion to The Consubstantial Trinity; yet no hideous imprecation could have

sounded with greater horror in the ears of bigoted vainglory and intolerance.

But the Emperor Anastasius had adopted the improved Trisagion, and where monarchs lead the way there will always be thousands to follow.

At this juncture an excited stir ran through the congregation ; for an instant the indecorous hum of voices rose louder than ever, and then subsided into complete stillness, as in these days we see a theatrical audience settle themselves, while the curtain rises, to the real business of the evening. All eyes were directed to Barsumas and Isidore, the leaders of the choir. The former had regained his breath and composure, and an air of sullen determination pervaded his heavy features.

From the harsh countenance of Isidore beamed, on the contrary, an almost benevolent smile, and there was something of paternal, something of martial interest in the encouraging glance which he threw down his line of choristers. He was so far softened by the impending collision as to stroke gently the curly shining head of the boy immediately in front of him.

The Chanter ascended the desk, and intoned the opening phrases—

“ Holy God ! Holy Mighty ! Holy Immortal ! ”

In another instant, with a glorious burst of sound, Barsumas and his party dashed into the hymn.

“ Holy, holy, holy ! Lord God of Hosts ! ”

pealed out the grand tones of adoration, striking in their sudden energy and volume a shiver through the expectant audience. Even the small, sunken eyes of Barsumas seemed to flash with righteous enthusiasm as the waves of harmony surged and reverberated among the columns of the aisle.

Not until the cadence was almost dying into stillness did Isidore give the signal for the response, and then it rang out—the triumphant message of Christianity, the rank, intolerable blasphemy of Peter the Fuller—

“ Who didst suffer for us upon the cross,
Have mercy upon us ! ”

The audacious sentences had hardly left the lips of Isidore and his accomplices when the uncontrollable excitement of the congregation broke into expression, and the church was filled with clamour. Many lifted up their voices in concert, if not in harmony, with the choir, and, according to their opinions, thundered out either the orthodox or heretical response. In vain did the Patriarch with dignified gesture enjoin silence; in vain did the deacons hurry from side to side, endeavouring to enforce it. The challenge had been given, the trumpets had sounded, and the multitude were not to be baulked of their enjoyment.

And now might be witnessed the extraordinary

and indecent spectacle of two sections of a cathedral choir singing furiously against each other, and reiterating verse for verse the original or the amended Trisagion. In this disgraceful contest the coolness and lean habit of Isidore served him well. Calm as ever, and with the same provoking bland smile upon his face, he rolled out the awful words of the chant, whilst his chief antagonist, purple with rage, was suffocating himself in his exertions to eclipse him.

At length, incapable of further articulation, driven to desperation, Barsumas seized the heavily mounted tablet which lay before him on the desk, hurled it with all his strength at the head of Isidore, and reeling with an oath from his place in the choir, strove as fast as his enormous size would permit to come to close quarters with his enemy.

“Devil!” he gasped, “I will strangle thee!”

But the tall man was not to be taken by surprise. Stooping to avoid the missile, which expended itself upon the portly person of a non-belligerent citizen, he drew from somewhere beneath his clothing a short cudgel, and before the eunuch could get within grappling distance, with the full swing of his long arm smote him fiercely across the head, and stretched him senseless on the pavement. The success was hardly achieved before it was avenged, for a sharp fragment of marble, striking Isidore

on the cheek, laid it open to the bone, and caused the blood to spout freely over his vestment. In another moment the choristers on both sides were engaged in a furious hand-to-hand struggle.

A number of Isidore's followers had provided themselves with a concealed weapon similar to their leader's, and these they now used with tremendous effect on the heads and shoulders of their antagonists. As a kind of counter to this advantage, the boys Dulcissimus and Pudens flitted and dodged about the fray, delivering the stony contents of their satchels at close range and with great precision, while their companions extemporized weapons out of the legs and rails of benches, stools, hassocks, music-tablets, and prayer-books indiscriminately.

And thus did the insane folly of man desecrate the temple reared to the Eternal Wisdom.

But now the commanding tones of the Patriarch sounded above the tumult, and at his bidding a strong band of brawny monks came swinging into the choir, and by main force interposed between the combatants.

The wounded—and there were not a few, including Barsumas and Isidore, who had sustained severe injuries—were conveyed at once to the baptistry as the most convenient spot where their hurts might be attended to, and the remainder, divided into two bodies, still under the escort of the

monks, were marched out of the church by different doors.

As it was impossible under the circumstances to continue the service, the Patriarch went through the form of blessing and dismissing the congregation—a somewhat superfluous ceremony, for the majority were already in rapid retreat by every possible exit, in the hope, no doubt, of witnessing a renewal of the contest outside. In this, for the present, they were disappointed; but new complications arose, and things began to take an ugly aspect.

Intelligence of the atrocious scene in the church was speedily conveyed in all its details to the Emperor, who, although confined to the palace by an attack of the malady which eventually destroyed him, had not abated one jot of his stubborn animosity against the Patriarch. In an access of passion he issued orders for the immediate arrest of the ringleaders, and especially of Barsumas, whose open aggression had been the actual origin of the riot, and of whom he swore a solemn oath to make an example. He probably calculated on the opposition of Macedonius, and, if so, was not disappointed; but in this instance, as will be seen, his cunning overreached itself.

The eunuch still lay in a state of insensibility, while Isidore was able, after his wound had been dressed, to slip off and betake himself to a place of safety, not much the worse for the encounter.

The sagacity of the Patriarch had foreseen the Emperor's anger, and he laid his plans accordingly. In an incredibly short time his messengers had spread through the city and monasteries the tidings that the liberty and life of the bold champion of the true Trisagion were endangered. Hundreds, thousands of the brethren girded up their loins for the battle ; and when the detachment of guards arrived at the baptistry to demand the person of Barsumas, they were confronted by a compact phalanx of monks, stern and silent, in the midst of which the eunuch was concealed and protected as effectually as in a citadel.

Opposed by this formidable barrier, surrounded by an excited mob, and uncertain of the temper of his men—for many of the soldiers were dissenters from the Imperial doctrines—young Paris, the officer in charge, was prudent enough not to risk a collision which must have terminated in disaster, but drew off his men amid the jeers of the crowd, and returned to make his report and ask for reinforcements. But, before they could arrive, Barsumas had been smuggled away and deposited in security.

By the evening the city was in a seditious uproar, by no means the last which I shall have to record. The monks had their chance afforded them, and they made the best use of it. Vast processions of both sexes and all ages swept through the streets, alternately chanting the unadulterated

Trisagion and anathematizing the Emperor, for whose immediate deposition they clamoured. The heretic minority, finding opposition useless, wisely held their tongues and bided their time.

CHAPTER V.

IMPERIOUS CÆSAR.

IN the mean time we may venture to penetrate within the closely guarded walls of the palace, to an antechamber of the Imperial apartments, where sat a select assembly of some four or five Illustrious personages, debating according to their lights how to save the Emperor in spite of himself.

There were present at the small council—Justin, general of the empire and Commander of the Guards, the veteran hero of the Persian and Isaurian wars, conspicuous by his gigantic stature and splendid accoutrements ; Proclus, the Prefect ; Hypatius, the Emperor's nephew, and suitor, as we know, for the hand of the fair Maria ; the eunuch Amantius, Prefect of the Sacred Bedchamber and Lord Chamberlain ; and the aged Empress Ariadne, most orthodox of women, but most devoted of wives.

Their task was no easy one, for at every suggestion of a concession to Macedonius, the suffering

monarch lashed himself into a fury, and his physicians at once interposed.

“Never!” he thundered in reply, alike to the tears and prayers of the Empress and the respectful entreaties of his counsellors. “Never! Let him be the first to bend; let him approach me as a rebellious subject should approach his sovereign, submissive and trembling; let him resign at my feet that iniquitous bond extorted in the hour of my weakness, and then, and then only, will it be time to talk of concession.”

Now, as the Emperor and every one else knew perfectly well, Macedonius was as likely to do all this as to attempt the restoration of paganism; therefore the obstinacy which prompted these ebullitions seemed to render the case hopeless.

“Say I,” exclaimed Hypatius, when for the third time such a discouraging message was brought back, “say I, let my Imperial uncle but give the word, let me lead forth the long swords of the Heruli, and the Illustrious Justin the veterans, whom he has so often led to victory against the Persian, and I pledge my life that by this time to-morrow the streets shall be clear of that shouting rabble, and the Patriarch on his knees.”

But the Illustrious Justin, although he smiled approvingly at the bold words and glowing face of the handsome Patrician, either from prudence or secret motives of his own, did not take an enthu-

siastic view of the proposition, and it was instantly overruled by the voices of the rest, and especially of the Empress.

“Shame, shame, Hypatius!” said the August lady. “Is it not written that they which take the sword shall perish with the sword? Is there not enough bloodshed and lawlessness to bewail in this unhappy city, that the shepherd must smite his flock, a Christian the followers of Christ, and Cæsar the citizens of Rome?”

“But when the flock turns upon the shepherd, and the citizens of Rome on Cæsar,” argued the count, impatiently, “how then?”

“Most gracious and benign lady,” said Amantius, a man with a furtive eye and feline characteristics, “and you, Noble and Illustrious sirs, when resistance becomes injudicious and inactivity fatal, there still remains one resource, that of temporary retreat. This outbreak is but transient; the reaction must come. The populace, roused by guile against a beloved ruler, whose virtues and wisdom they have so long worshipped, when they find that their idol is no longer amongst them, will return to their allegiance and repent in sackcloth and ashes. The galleys, manned by picked men for whose fidelity I will pledge my worthless existence, lie near the garden stairs. An hour will suffice to transport to them the contents of the private treasury. By daybreak the persons of their Sacred

Majesties and their Illustrious nephew, on whom rests the future hopes of the empire, will be in safety ; to the Noble Proclus may be permitted the felicity of attending them. The valorous Commander must remain to insure the fidelity of the troops, and I to insure secrecy among the domestics. If the storm break, let it break on me ! What matter the fate of a reed, if the forest tree be but preserved ? ”

The position of Amantius as Lord Chamberlain necessitated his constant proximity to the sacred person of Cæsar, and therefore enabled him to take precedence of all but the very highest ministers ; just as the Silentiari, whose chief duty was to enforce strict silence in the Imperial chambers, were also reckoned among the Illustrious—the most exalted grade in the Hierarchy of state—the glory of Majesty reflecting permanent splendour upon all who were habitually permitted to approach it. To treat so important an official with anything like disrespect was a gross breach of courtly etiquette ; nevertheless Count Hypatius, who had been listening with kindling eyes to the plausible accents of the Chamberlain, exclaimed abruptly—

“ Judas ! wouldest thou betray thy master ? ”

All started ; the Empress Ariadne gasped for breath, and Amantius, turning scarlet, whilst his eyes sparkled with malicious fury, was for some moments incapable of uttering a syllable.

“Count Hypatius,” he said at last, with some assumption of dignity, “I protest against this outrageous insult and monstrous imputation. In my unworthy person you are attacking the condescension of Cæsar, who for these many years has thought fit to honour me with his confidence.”

“My Lord Chamberlain,” answered the Count, boldly, “I know not what others may think, but to my ears your words sound like those of a traitor, who has not the wit to veil his treachery. This secret preparation of the galleys confirms my suspicions. If now, when his presence in the city is indispensable, when to fly is utter ruin, you can seriously counsel your too trusting master, feeble and suffering as he is, to escape—God knows whither—I am compelled to believe that either your fidelity or—I grant you the alternative—your reason has given way.”

At these words, the random truth of which probably struck home, the Chamberlain winced as if under the lash; but as Hypatius concluded, a sonorous “Peace be with you!” resounded through the antechamber, and all turned to confront the dignified figure of the Abbot Severus, who had just passed silently through the entrance curtains.

Severus, ex-lawyer and monk, was at present the bosom counsellor of the Emperor in religious matters, a man whose sagacious ambiguity and subtlety of tongue and pen forced even his enemies

into admitting that he was a liar who spoke the truth. As not long afterwards he was promoted to the rich see of Antioch, and consequently disappeared for many years from the sphere of Constantinopolitan affairs, he is personally little more than a cypher in these pages, but his influence was felt considerably in the administration of matters political as well as ecclesiastical, and on the present occasion it was more than suspected that, himself a staunch Eutychian, he had instigated the Emperor into adopting the amended Trisagion.

“Peace be with you!” reiterated Severus, advancing to salute the Empress, and speaking in a voice which fell like oil upon the troubled waters. “High words and strong expressions forced themselves upon my ears as I approached; may I not act as peacemaker? Calm yourself, Count Hypatius, I beseech you, and reflect that there is cruelty and injustice in this sudden accusation of a tried and valued servant whose zeal for the safety of his lord outweighs all other considerations; and do you, my Lord Chamberlain, not attach too much importance to words uttered hastily, in the hour of peril and in disquietude of heart.”

“He has been listening outside,” grumbled Justin to himself. “But the fellow has a head on his shoulders; he can make mischief enough, but he can mend it too. I am glad he has come. Your Reverence,” he continued aloud, “doubtless

understands the position of affairs as well as we do. The moments are becoming precious, especially to a soldier. I shall be glad, with her Majesty's leave, to learn whether I am to call out the household troops at once, in default of your Reverence having any feasible plan to propose ; our debate hitherto being fruitless of aught except dissension."

Severus looked towards the Empress.

" Speak, sir, I implore you," said Ariadne, " and avert bloodshed if possible. We may differ from your Reverence in matters of religious opinion, but all such differences must be merged in the one desire to support Cæsar and terminate these unhappy quarrels."

" To me, then, it appears," said Severus, " that Count Hypatius is right as regards the project of flight ; it is politically dangerous, and in the present state of his Majesty's health all but impracticable. The zealous devotion of my Lord Chamberlain has underrated the difficulties. Nor is the idea of military intervention less perilous. The tried loyalty of the Domestics can doubtless be depended upon under any circumstances, but where religious questions are at stake the same cannot be said of the mass of troops which occupy the city. Many of the cohorts would side at once with the people. We shall be sowing internecine discord in the army at a time when its unanimity

is all-important to the state, and assisting the ambitious interference of Vitalian."

"Vitalian!" exclaimed Justin, impatiently. "Bah!—In God's name, then, what do you propose?"

"If with the sanction of the August Empress," said Severus, calmly ignoring the irritation of the Commander, "I may be permitted a private audience, I doubt not of being able, with divine help, to suggest to the wisdom of Cæsar such considerations as will induce him to consent to a reconciliation with the Patriarch, and thereby restore tranquillity to the city."

"Impossible," objected Proclus. "Cæsar has sworn never again to hold communication with his Holiness."

"Nevertheless, I humbly request to be allowed this interview," pleaded the Churchman, with obsequious persistence. "If I fail, matters are no worse than at present; if I succeed, we are delivered from a serious dilemma, from which there appears for the moment no means of escape."

"Then, in the name of Heaven, try!" exclaimed Ariadne, fervently, clasping her thin hands, "and the holy saints be with you!"

And so, after a while, it was settled, and Severus was admitted alone to the Imperial presence.

The pious Empress retired at once to her boudoir to implore the forgiveness of her favourite saint,

St. Euphemia, for having accepted the mediation of the heretic Severus, and was even gracious enough to pray that the monk might be inspired with the eloquence necessary to success. The Chamberlain slunk away like a tiger into its jungle, leaving Justin and Proclus in earnest conversation. As for Hypatius, he sauntered to the window and listened to the clamour of the seditious city, cooling his hot head with the breeze which came fresh and balmy over the blue waves of the Propontis.

“Hasty, injudicious, loud-tongued,” murmured Proclus, despondently apostrophizing the young Patrician, “he does not lack courage and can speak boldly, but his courage is inopportune and his speech impulsive; he has no stability, and will never make either general or politician.”

Pale and haggard, weighed down with the triple burden of years, sickness, and anxiety, Anastasius, the Emperor of the East, lay prostrate among the silken pillows of his couch, but he raised his head and extended his withered hand with a gesture of welcome as the abbot was ushered in.

“Ah, Severus,” he murmured, “you are here at last; one at least who will not double the tortures I undergo by a repetition of hateful counsel.”

“God forbid,” said the Churchman, earnestly, “that I should ever be the means of aggravating your Majesty’s sufferings. To relieve the distress of the mind goes far towards lessening the anguish

of the body. Your Sublimity will deign to receive my poor suggestions?"

"Willingly," replied Cæsar, "if they do not tend towards the same detestable theme—submission, concession; submission to the Church, concession to the Patriarch. It has been whined into my ears until I am sick of it. Ah, Severus," he moaned, "I would I were dead and at rest! I have toiled and striven for the good of this people, I have slaved for their happiness, I have answered their prayers and gratified their whims, I have remitted tax on tax, and now, in my extreme age, when I am sick unto death, my pearls have been cast before swine, and they turn and rend me."

"The branches may be agitated and torn by the tempest," replied Severus, launching into parable, "but the root remain firm as ever. Though the machinations of evil men prevail for a while, the devotion of the people to your sacred person is unshaken. Whatever be the privilege of his August consort, far be it from me to couple the name of Cæsar with submission; but the devoted follower of his Master, Christ, will pardon the advice of—patience."

The Emperor made no reply, and after a pause Severus ventured to proceed.

"The physicians who attend upon your Majesty do not recommend submission to the malady, but patience under the infliction, while they employ

the best means for its ultimate reduction. That counsel I venture in all humility to echo."

"I am too ill to interpret riddles," said Anastasius, testily. "Your Reverence's speech is ambiguous as that of a heathen oracle."

"Your Condescension will graciously bear with my metaphor a little longer. In certain feverish conditions of the body there is danger in resorting at once to the most efficacious remedies; for an operation, the system must be toned down and tranquillized. O Cæsar! in such a condition is this city, and to such a state of tranquillity must it be brought, ere the radical cause of the disease can be removed. Let your Majesty, like a skilful physician, compass this preliminary stage, and I will answer for the final success of the operation."

The Emperor raised himself on his elbow and looked steadily at his counsellor.

"Speak boldly," he said.

"A concession, Thrice-August, a temporary concession to his Holiness, will calm the tumult, but he who has forced Cæsar into condescension must submit to the consequences."

"And they are?"

"To be removed like an unhealthy tumour, and rendered incapable of spreading his contagion further."

"My God!" exclaimed Anastasius, "what counsel do you give me? Even now such a

thought passed through my mind, and I dismissed it as a suggestion of the Evil One, and it confronts me again from the lips of a man of God! Moreover, to—to remove him from office at present would be madness; it would doubly inflame the people."

"Doubtless, if he were suffered to remain amongst them. But they are fickle in all save their devotion to Cæsar, which remains unmoved amid transient excitement. The absent are soon forgotten. I would counsel your Omnipotence to go a step further and remove him altogether."

A look of ghastly surprise swept over the face of Anastasius. Were the embryo thoughts of those hours of solitary rage and despair to rise against him as matured temptations?

But Severus caught the expression and hastened to explain himself.

"I would not hurt a hair of his Holiness's head, or employ more violence than was necessary for the constraint of his person; and above all, publicity is to be avoided. The silence of the night, the co-operation of a handful of Cæsar's devoted subjects, a swift galley, and all is accomplished."

"It is a bold step," mused the Emperor.

"It is a bold step," replied the abbot, "for a subject to dictate to his sovereign, to hold over him a perpetual threat, to resist the Imperial guards in the execution of the Imperial commands!"

“True, by Heaven!” exclaimed Anastasius, as the thought of the bond flashed across him. “Artifice must be met by artifice, audacity by audacity; but”—and his countenance fell—“the Goth, Vitalian?”

“If he seek an explanation, it must come from Cæsar’s legions.”

“Cæsar distrusts his legions,” said Anastasius, sadly, “and those who lead them. Justin is a brave and skilful soldier, but a too ambitious subject. Hypatius, whom I have marked as my successor, is rash and headstrong. I have even fancied of late that my faithful Amantius lacked something of his former affection, and that at times his eye has a crafty, traitorous glance. God help me! I distrust everybody and everything.”

“May I dare to hope that my beloved lord will except one whose life is at his service?” said Severus, bending to his knee.

“Heaven knows I am willing to believe in your fidelity,” said the agitated Emperor. “But for this scheme; are there any who can be entrusted with its execution? Who will dare to lay hands upon the Patriarch?”

“There are those who will dare greater things in Cæsar’s service,” replied Severus. “I have even now in my mind a fitting instrument—a man of consummate daring, prudence, and above all—”

"A consummate scoundrel, I fear," added Anastasius, with a sickly attempt at a smile. "Ah! Severus, you ecclesiastics! what chance has a layman—even an Emperor—against you?"

"The Church," replied the abbot, "has need of all instruments, great and insignificant. But your Majesty comprehends that the first step must be the pacification of the city and monasteries?"

"This concession?" asked Anastasius, nervously; "you would not have me humiliate myself too much?"

"I trust, if permitted to undertake the office of mediator, to spare your Sublimity any condescension. If, after a settlement has been effected, chance should reveal that I have exceeded your Majesty's unspoken sentiments, it will not be difficult to disclaim my authority to do so. But I trust that no such complication will arise."

"Does your Reverence propose to visit the Patriarch alone?"

"Accompanied by the Noble Proclus, if Cæsar approve."

"Undoubtedly; a sterling man, of great tact and foresight. But," added the Emperor, with hesitation, while a faint flush of shame, the last effort of conscience, overspread his pale features, "he will not be informed of our resolution?"

"It is unnecessary, Thrice-August," replied the unabashed abbot. "Cæsar may rely upon his servant's discretion."



“ And he may rely on Cæsar’s gratitude,” said Anastasius, achieving for the second time the ghost of a smile. “ More than one see is likely to be vacant ere long.”

The heart of the ambitious ecclesiastic throbbed in his bosom as he bowed himself out of the presence, and his face wore an ill-concealed look of triumph when he entered the antechamber ; but he spoke blandly and without excitement.

“ It has pleased Heaven to prosper my humble endeavours. Cæsar has graciously assented to my bearing a message of reconciliation to his Holiness.”

A look of surprise passed between the hearers. “ And by what miracle has this happy change been effected ? ” asked Hypatius.

“ Doubtless by the intervention of the blessed saints ! ” exclaimed the Empress, who had returned from her devotions. “ If your mission to his Holiness be successful, as it cannot fail to be, I will dedicate a new shrine to St. Euphemia, whose aid I have been imploring.”

“ Saints be hanged,” muttered Justin to himself ; “ more likely some infernal rascality : ” that Illustrious officer naturally regarding all intrigues except his own as unjustifiable.

With a small escort, the two ambassadors, Severus and Proclus, set out on their errand of reconciliation, and passed into the noisy, crowded

Augusteum. Before long their passage was barred by a dense crowd, to which a monk, mounted on a pedestal that had lately supported a statue of Anastasius, now lying broken at its base, held forth with impassioned voice and gesture.

“Lo! I myself have seen the ungodly in great power. I went by and he was gone, and his place could nowhere be found. The Lord has broken the staff of the wicked, and the sceptre of the rulers. Therefore, stand fast, ye faithful, who wrestle against spiritual wickedness in high places; fear neither the hosts of hell nor the legions of Cæsar, for they shall not prevail against you.

“Woe unto you, Monophysites, Theopascites, Acephali! who make Christ a phantom and His sacrifice of no avail; who reject His incarnation in the very essence thereof, the perfection of the double nature, perfect Godhead, perfect humanity, and, blasphemous that ye are, crucify the Incomprehensible Triune, the God Indivisible, Eternal, the Lord of Hosts! of you it is written, raging waves of the sea are ye, foaming out your own shame; wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever! . . .

“Woe unto thee, tyrant! heresiarch! perfidious Emperor! thou art unworthy to reign. Thy men of war shall avail thee naught, thy gates of brass and thy walls of marble; for the Lord shall raise up a champion for His servants, and the Goth

shall come upon thee. Behold ! a people cometh from the north country, and a great nation from the sides of the earth ; they shall lay hold on bow and spear, they are cruel and have no mercy, their voice roareth like the sea ! ”

At this moment the speaker caught sight of Severus and his party, wedged in the crowd beneath him, and changed the thread of his discourse.

“ Hearken, ye heretics ! ” he cried, “ hearken ! for I have a message unto you ! Behold ! last night I fell into a trance, having my eyes open, and there stood by me an angel clothed in white, and beautiful exceedingly ; but his face was the face of a mourner, and his eyes were filled with celestial tears. And he drew forth a scroll from his raiment and read therefrom : ‘ Weep, O ye sons of men ! for there is weeping among the angels of God, and the splendour of Heaven is darkened. Michael is dead ! the glorious Archangel is no more ! the Trampler of Satan hath passed away, and there is joy in the abyss of hell.’ And the angel vanished, leaving the scroll in mine hand ; and I looked, and lo ! ” said the orator, drawing a scroll from the bosom of his robe amid breathless silence, “ it is written even as I heard it : ‘ Weep, O ye sons of men ! Michael the Archangel is dead ! ’ ”

Here he paused, and all eyes were fixed on Severus, whose person was well known, and at

whom the latter part of the discourse had been pointed by the look and gesture of the speaker.

“Man, thou ravest!” cried the abbot scornfully, taking up the unmistakable challenge of the orator. “It is not in the nature of celestial beings to perish ; the Archangel cannot die.”

“Even so,” thundered his assailant, “even so ! An Archangel cannot die. How say ye, then, fools and blind ? Can the One, the Indivisible, the I Am, the infinitely greater than angels and archangels, the pure and mere Deity, suffer death ? If Christ existed not in the glorious perfection of the double nature, but rather, as ye have it, in the meagre incarnation of one, is not the full sacrifice of Calvary a fable, the resurrection a myth, and your salvation a lie ? ”

A roar of triumphant applause burst from the excited audience, followed by a yell of savage derision at the discomfiture of Severus, and it seemed not unlikely, from the fierce demeanour of the mob, that worse might follow ; but Proclus spoke in a calm, clear voice—

“Make room there and let us pass ; we are on a mission to his Holiness the Patriarch.”

The mob hesitated, and drew back before the commanding tones and stately figure of the Prefect, and slowly opened a lane for the passage of the group, while more than one voice shouted, “Long live the Noble Proclus, the friend of the

people ! ” but the orator fired a parting shot at the retreating heretics : “ Yea, their own tongues shall make them fall, insomuch that whoso seeth them shall laugh them to scorn.”

However much or however little Severus may have conceded on behalf of his Imperial master, it was sufficient to satisfy the Patriarch, who may be credited with the laudable desire to terminate the disorders of the city, and the not unnatural wish of displaying his power and generosity to the populace ; which he presently did, going in state to the palace, and after a short interview with the Emperor returning to scatter broadcast the tidings of reconciliation and goodwill, received with thanksgiving by the respectable tithe of the community, with murmurs by the fanatical, and with smothered curses by the rowdies of both Factions, whose occupation was for the moment gone. It is true they had not long to wait for another opportunity.

CHAPTER VI.

THE MASTER OF THE BEARS.

FROM the precincts of the palace and the din of seditious tumult we must shift the scene to the midnight quiet of the Seventh Region of the city, where the angel of death stood waiting at the threshold of a house in one of the narrow back streets ; so narrow and shut in as to be impervious even to the inquisitive radiance of the full moon, which lavished a sweltering flood of beams far and wide over land and sea.

But in spite of the lateness of the hour and the pitchy silence of the place, it appeared that some one from the outer world had business there, for a man who had been rapidly traversing the moonlit thoroughfares of the city paused at the entrance of the alley and gazed doubtfully into the darkness.

Some moments elapsed before the eyes of this wanderer, becoming accustomed to the gloom, detected the faint glimmer of a lamp from behind

a single casement, and then, guided by this very glow-worm of a beacon, he groped his way with difficulty along the wall, and tapped at the pane.

In a few seconds the grating of a bolt was heard, and the adjoining door half opening showed the pale features of a woman by the rays of a small lamp which she raised to scrutinize the features of her visitor.

“It is I, Hermia. Is he still alive ?”

“Come in, in God’s name,” replied the woman, holding open the door, which she carefully closed as soon as the man had entered. “I was afraid it might be that she-fiend ; but she would scarcely have come so quietly. He lives still, though in great agony, and has been expecting you these hours ; he declares he cannot die without speech of you. If he would but talk instead with the holy man who was here yesterday——”

“Peace, peace !” interrupted the visitor impatiently, laying aside the large cloak which had hitherto shrouded him from head to foot, and revealing the massive frame of John of Cappadocia. “In there ? Is he alone ?”

The woman nodded, went silently to the curtain, which closed the entrance to an inner apartment, and held it back.

“And the children ?” he asked.

“Asleep, poor things—or quiet, at least.”

“Remain here and watch,” said John ; and

letting the curtain fall behind him, he passed into the room beyond.

It was a fair-sized but low chamber, illumined by the flame, and rendered obscure by the smoke from the enormous wick of a bronze lamp which stood on a pedestal in the corner. This pedestal the ingenuity of some rude artist had hewn into the resemblance of a bear standing on its hind legs, and supporting the lamp on its head. By the same hand the surface of the walls had been adorned with the representations of various animals which the shows and combats of the Circus had rendered familiar to the inhabitants of Constantinople. Here crouched a tiger in the act of springing, there a lion with distended jaws and standing mane; on this side stood a wild boar champing the foam round his white tusks, on that was repeated the uncouth form and shaggy hide of the bear.

Against the wall farthest from the doorway was fastened a kind of trophy composed of javelins, spear-heads, short clubs, axes, and other weapons, surrounding, in the form of a star, the grim head of a buffalo, from the giant horns of which depended the terrific lashes of several whips plaited with hide and wire, a broad belt studded with brass, and a sash or baldric of green cloth sustaining a short massive sword. Along one side of the beam which traversed the ceiling drooped

festoons of heavy chains, with iron and leather collars attached ; on the other side rested, on tenter-hooks, the shaft of a long goad terminating in a fine-drawn point of steel.

The furniture of the chamber was scanty, and of the plainest description ; in the right-hand corner stood a bed, and on the bed, half covered by a black bear-skin, lay the dying man whom the Cappadocian stood silently contemplating.

He lay with his eyes closed, and breathing heavily ; his grizzled hair, matted with the sweat of agony, clinging over a low, savage, but not unintellectual forehead ;—a man whose now wasted form, to judge by the long gaunt arms and massive chest which the coverlet left exposed, must once have possessed no common strength.

The Cappadocian approached the bedside, and took in his own the thin, bony hand of the dying man.

“ Acacius, my friend, how fare you ? ” he said.

The kindly touch and low vibrating tone roused the sufferer from the stupor in which he lay, and a light came into his dull eyes as he fixed them earnestly on the face of the questioner.

“ Now the gods be praised you are come ! ” he said, in a faint, husky voice ; “ for I thought to pass away without seeing you, and I doubt now if I have strength to say all that should be said.”

“ I was abroad when your messenger came,” said John. “ Is there no hope ? ”

"Ask the archhealer who was here last night," replied Acacius; "he will tell you, as he told me, I am doomed; I cannot live over to-morrow, even if I see the sun rise again."

"There was also a monk here yesterday?" said John, after a short pause.

"Ay; he tracked me out. They are keen on the scent of death, those gentry——"

"To him you said nothing?"

"Nothing that concerns us;" and a bitter sneer crossed the countenance of the dying man. "He spoke but of matters which monks will speak of; and I was fain to let him talk, for I was too weak to answer, and he was kind to the children. Hermia can tell you more of that. And now," he continued, almost in a whisper, "give me in a cup of water twenty drops from the phial which the doctor left—on the table there—for the faintness comes over me again; and if it once get the better of me, you may never learn what is on my mind to say."

The Cappadocian did as he was requested, and supported the patient whilst he swallowed with difficulty the contents of the cup held to his lips; then propping him up with the pillows, he drew a seat to the bedside, and waited for him to speak again.

For some minutes Acacius lay silent and motionless as a corpse, as though husbanding his strength

for a final effort, and allowing the potion to work its invigorating effect. At last he opened his eyes, and began in a clearer, firmer voice.

“ Five years ago you, John the Cappadocian, a penniless adventurer seeking your fortune in this city, found out Acacius the Cyprian, then Master of the bears to the Green Faction : a mean office, if you will ; hard work, plenty of curses, and not too much pay ; a slave, if you will, but a cheerful, contented slave, who in his calling feared neither man nor beast, and more, was proud of what he had to do, and did it well. When the Circus rang with shouts at the sight of the brutes which he tended and managed as other men tend and manage their dogs, when they fought well and died well, that man, I tell you, felt his blood stir and heart throb with a sort of wild-beast pride. To have gone in and raged and fought among them, and have rolled in the blood and dust of the arena, would have been to him like the holding a fair girl in their arms to other men. To see the lion glare through the bars, and to open the den and make the iron lash curl and twist round him until the beast cowered and whined like a cur, that was sweet ; and to watch the same beast in the Circus strive and tear, crunch and worry, fangs and claws streaming with blood, that was sweet again. When he had leisure he even spent that leisure in making the images of his pets, that night and

day, waking or sleeping, they might be near him.

“ And for this man what did you do—for this half man, half beast, who had been contented in his own brutal way to find bread for his offspring? for he had a mate and a brood, this monster. Some jealous demon, envious of his mortal brother, put it into your heart to seek out this man, and to fill his mind with a more evil rage, a more cursed passion than that which possessed him already—with the lust of ambition! As he listened to you all the savage energy of his nature flowed into a new channel; the fever in his blood burst into a fire which consumed his very heart. . . . You taught him that it was written in the unlying language of the stars, in the dark volume of the future which you had science to unclasp, that for the house of Acacius the Cyprian, Master of the bears, was in store the greatest honour and prosperity that the world could bestow. Was it not so? ”

The Cappadocian bowed his head in assent without speaking.

“ From that time,” went on Acacius, “ my doom was sealed. To that idea I surrendered myself, soul and body. What I had been to those beasts that gorgeous phantom became to me—a tyrannous Presence, before which I bowed and trembled, which goaded me to the struggle against my kind,

which I loved with a fierce, unreasoning love ; and for you who raised it, you best know how I have toiled for you, how in your service I have prowled and sneaked, and watched and listened, have played the spy and the informer, how week after week, month after month, year after year, ay, to the very last, as long as I was able to crawl, I have never failed in my tryst or my report. I believed blindly that our destinies were interwoven—that the stream which carried one with it must carry both. Within ten years was the golden shower to begin, and the longing Danae of our toil to teem pregnant with the demigod of success. Ay, they are your own fine words ; I remember them well. . . .

“ Then came that time of suspicion and disgrace —of that lie—when they swore that I had been bribed to drug the beasts which fought, to win money for the bribers ; I, whose glory it was to foster their strength and ferocity to the utmost, and to hear men say, ‘ There is no one who understands these devils like Acacius.’ They spoke the truth then ; they have found no one to satisfy them, no one to replace the old Cyprian. Even now the lover of that accursed woman is hoping to stand in my shoes there, as he has done elsewhere. The fool ! there are those who can prevent that, if they could not assist me. . . . And then I began to lose my nerve, and the beasts found it out.

I was always overdaring with them, and my boy—my darling—who would have helped me,—I could not save him from the lion, though I tore at the brute with my naked hands. I dare not speak of that. . . .

“ The golden shower may yet descend on you ; I am content that it should be so. If you have been an exacting master you have been ever a kind and true one ; unlike that accursed Faction—which may the gods confound !—which I served for the best years of my life as it was never served before or will be again, which took from me my office, deserted me in my trouble, and will reckon my death of less account than that of the meanest beast in the Circus. . . . But what part in the future have I or mine ? I die a beggar, and of my family what remains ? Three girls, three helpless children ; the daughters of an outcast, degraded partisan ! You know well what is the fate of such in this city of devils—to be mocked, insulted, outraged ; to become playthings for some licentious patrician ; to be cast out at a moment’s notice to wallow in the gutter with the vilest of the vile ; to be absorbed into the cesspool of iniquity. Can your stars pluck them thence to make them things of beauty and honour ? Can all the old gods and the new rescue them ? Go to ! there are no gods. They have destroyed the old, and given us in their place a phantom and a name.”



The stricken giant was terrible as he lay there, hopelessly struggling, in the blind agony of his stubborn paganism, against the bitterness of despair and death.

The Cappadocian wiped the death-dew from the forehead of the moribund, and held the cup again to his lips before he answered.

“Acacius,” he said, earnestly, “all that I told you in those first days I believed then, as I believe now—as in the teeth of circumstances, against all appearances, I must believe still. Twenty times I have repeated and verified my calculations. There is no error, and the stars cannot lie. Their language is not even doubtful, save, as ever, in the one point—for which of your family the glorious destiny is in store. Over that lies a cloud which all my research and patience cannot penetrate. With more accurate knowledge of your children’s nativities I might have succeeded better, but you cannot supply it, and I am checked. But the main conclusion is indisputable, and the fortune of one must affect all who survive. Whilst you, though but a servant, were popular and favoured, I dared to hope that the splendid future might be your own, or—forgive me—your bright, promising son’s. Why not? as strange things have happened ere now. Ere now, by strength and daring alone, a man has leapt at one bound from the ranks to the purple. What better was the present dotard but a palace menial? Who shall say——”

“Enough, enough,” interrupted Acacius, impatiently. “Our hopes have vanished into the dark gulf of nothingness, whither I must shortly follow. It may be that your grand science can still find in this miserable wreck a straw for your perishing visions to cling to. So be it. I did not send for you to reproach you. I would help you to a less frail support. . . . At first, when the Faction turned me adrift and laughed at my petition, I laughed too; for I believed that one day I should hold my head higher than any of them. As I brooded over my wrongs and the end seemed no nearer, I grew furious, mad; I thirsted for revenge. If I could live, it might be mine yet; as it is, I bequeath my debt of vengeance to you, the rather that the payment of it will serve your own purposes.

“You know well that when the Emperor dies there will be more than one candidate for the purple, and you know also that a wise man will follow the fortunes of the Dacian Justin and his nephew Justinian. Their triumph, with the help of the guards, is certain. In action, the general has the courage of a seven-years’ boar; and Justinian, bookworm though he be, is sagacious and resolute as an elephant. Their triumph means that of the Blue Faction, and the downfall of the accursed Greens.

“Now there are ten men from either Faction, twenty in all—when I am dead to-morrow the

number will be one short—who are pledged to stand by each other and support the cause of the Dacians. They are fearless, unscrupulous, and staunch as wolves. In all the city you will find no hearts more determined, no hands more unfaltering. Where twenty such men give the lead, twenty thousand will follow. They constitute the Brotherhood of the Rising Sun. Again, each of these twenty can count among the Factions a hundred men of either colour who will answer his summons and ask no questions. These are the Sons of the Sanctuary. In the prospect of death it is the right of each member of the Brotherhood—a right which I now exercise—to appoint a successor and to furnish him with the necessary tokens. If within the year no one present himself, the vacancy will be filled up by vote. On this blank scroll you will find all particulars; heat will bring out the characters, and they will fade when the paper cools. I warn you, study it well. And now bend down your head, and lay your ear against my mouth."

The Cappadocian obeyed.

"You understand and will remember," said Acacius, regarding him earnestly, when after some moments he again raised himself, "I have revealed to you that secret which not under any circumstances whatever may be uttered aloud, or committed to writing—not under any circumstances

whatever," repeated the Cyprian. "As you value life remember that, and be on your guard. It is the last test. . . .

" Some day you may be glad of this. You are playing a dangerous game. For all your caution and cunning, chance may reveal to those gay Court insects the deadly, invisible web of the spider who is in their midst, and then John of Cappadocia, the detected informer, may not disdain the close fellowship of such as we are.

" If all go smoothly with you, the Brotherhood may be doubly serviceable to your ambition. When you have a mind to join it, go to the sixth house in the Alley of Hammers, leading out of the Street of the Docks, across the water, in Sycæ ; at night, and on the last day of the week. Once again I warn you, study that paper well, and remember the final test, or you are lost. . . . Our president is Giton the Cretan, the charioteer of the Blue Faction. The office is held for a year only, but he is sure of re-election. He is a man to rely on for any enterprise where there is risk to be run and money to be made. He can lay his hand at half an hour's notice on a dozen choice comrades who will shrink from nothing, and he has the best information about all that is going on. Young Dulcissimus, who sings psalms in church, and love-ditties on the sly at feasts and weddings, is his nephew ; a rare hand at prying into other people's

business. He has rare opportunities, too, with his girl's face and his devil's heart. He is spoilt and petted by half the nobles in the city, not to mention the women, religious and the reverse. . . . Demas, the head charioteer of the Greens, is with us also ; but he has a temporary conscience. The Emperor has been his patron, and as long as the old man lives he will take no part against him. Moreover, he is heart and soul in his calling. Being as true as steel, he has a dispensation from the Brotherhood to stand neutral until it comes to the question of a new Cæsar. It is as well, for there is a natural jealousy between him and Giton, though both favour the succession of the Dacians. . . . His daughter, Antonina, a clever, ambitious girl, is useful to us. She is as fair as Venus, and would coax a secret out of the Brazen Pillar. . . . Young Paris, of the Emperor's body-guard, is smitten with her, and the girl thinks to entice him into marriage. She may ; the soft-headed fop is no match for her in cunning. Give me the cup again ; this cursed faintness is coming on. . . .

“ I am placing a strong weapon in your hands ; use it skilfully and you are a made man. One caution more. Upon admission to the Brotherhood you will be called upon to qualify—to state openly some act of your life which proves you to possess daring and unscrupulousness ; the more the better—of both. Your career ought to render this

test easy, but reflect before you go, and be ready with your answer."

"I shall have little reason to search my past career," said John, "if I listen to a proposal I heard not twelve hours since."

"You may trust the discretion of a dying man," said Acacius, his sunken eyes kindling with interest.

"You have heard the events of the past week," said John, after some thought; "for the right or wrong of the question neither of us care one jot. The Emperor has made a truce with the Patriarch—a hollow affair, patched up by the ex-lawyer Severus. Yesterday, after nightfall, his Reverence paid me a visit. He began by beating about the bush, but he came to the point at last with a vengeance. There was one to be put aside—to be removed; a dangerous man, a rebel, a traitor, for whom exile was too lenient a sentence, but one, forsooth, not to be easily touched with impunity. Moreover, his Sacred Majesty was averse to violence and open scandal—the trembling hypocrite!—the affair must be managed with secrecy; there must be no delay or miscarriage. Who could be relied on for such a delicate service? The reward would be ample, and much more to the same purpose. Would I reflect upon the matter, and give him an answer at the earliest opportunity?

"To all this there is but one meaning; the man

to be got rid of is the Patriarch, Macedonius himself."

"It must be so," said Acacius, eagerly. "As assuredly as I lie here dying," he added with a groan, "I would gladly have stood with you in this matter."

"I have decided on nothing," said John. "The Patriarch is a pillar of the Blues, and will favour Justinian."

"But he is also a pillar of Christianity," growled Acacius. "I should have liked to help in tearing him down."

"Ah, my friend," said John, "there are twenty as good as he to rise in his place. It would require a dozen Julians even to shake the Church now. Personally, I cannot afford yet to indulge in sentiment; I merely regard the profitable side of the question. Can I make more by warning Macedonius than by listening to Severus?"

"Beware of Severus," said the Cyprian; "he has the ear of the Emperor, and is as cunning as a lynx. If he once suspect you of playing him false, you had better have remained a lawyer's drudge at Berytus to the end of your existence."

"Which would scarcely have been worse," said John, "than the drudgery of the secret service. If by closing with Severus I can free myself from that, and become once more an independent man, I shall scarcely hesitate. I must make my own

terms. But I have still twelve hours to think it over."

"And I by then shall be in the nethermost gloom of hell," said the dying pagan, in an awful whisper. "When we meet again you can tell me how you have sped. My time is short. I feel the hand of death clutching at my heart."

"Is there anything I can do for you, my friend?" asked John, kindly.

"I might ask a good deal," replied Acacius, "seeing how I have served you, but if I did my request would be in vain. Promises to the dead are soon forgotten; and I have received my due according to our compact—and more. My wages have been as liberal as you could afford, and in my sickness you have supported me and mine. Yet I have one last favour to ask, and you will swear to grant it? It will cost you little. You know how, to my sorrow, to provide a mother for my motherless children, I married that evil woman, who in the arms of her lover is now anxiously waiting for my death, who will come here to exult over it and her freedom. In my prosperity she was friendly and fair-spoken, but when I was down she trampled on me like the rest. She hates my children, the unhappy orphans whom I blindly hoped she would cherish and comfort. She will desert them, and if she can, work them ill. Our neighbour Hermia has done

her best. Had it not been for her good offices and your charity the girls had been nigh starving of late ; but she is poor, and has her own family. I cannot expect more of her ; neither do I look to you to burden yourself with the charge of three orphans. But if ever I have striven to satisfy you, if ever I have obeyed you—may-be to my ruin—help them now a little longer ; and when the city is quieted, when men have recovered from their present madness, and will listen to the voice of reason and justice, let my three daughters enter the theatre as suppliants, as the miserable were wont to do in the good old days ; let it be proclaimed that they are the children of Acacius, late Master of the bears. If there be one spark of generosity or pity left in the hearts of the Faction, such a sight cannot fail to fan it to a flame. Swear to me that you will see this done.”

“ If you insist upon it, I will,” said the Cappadocian with hesitation, “ but it appears to me a most imprudent step. Reflect upon the many perils to which those helpless girls will be exposed. Surely a private appeal to some of your old comrades is the safer course. As a member of the Brotherhood you speak of, have you no claim upon it ?

“ Were I as I used to be once, a strong, bold man, and my life or liberty were endangered, I could claim its assistance,” said Acacius, bitterly. “ The

Brotherhood has its objects and its privileges, but relief to the destitute and aid to the weak are not among them. It requires dauntless hearts, strong hands, shrewd brains, or full purses ; for such there is a welcome, and for such only. My old comrades have their hands, as a rule, tolerably full of their own affairs, and with them it is ever 'quick come soon gone.' They have not all neglected me, but a few kind words, a gold piece or two, and the matter is forgotten. Who can blame them ? No ! swear to me that my children shall appear as suppliants. If the Faction as a body take the matter in hand, there may be some permanent result."

"True," said John. "The question is, of what nature ? But supposing—for we must look at both sides—that it treats the appeal with indifference ? "

"Then," said the Cyprian, with a gleam of intense ferocity, "I devote my children to working out my vengeance, and I call upon all the demons which preside over hate and discord and bloodshed to hear my prayer. I cast them as a firebrand into the midst of the Factions. May the guilt of their rejected supplication and their blighted innocence cling to the city as a withering curse, and be avenged by years of damning vice and brutality, and rivers of blood. Now swear—swear that they shall appear. Swear it, lest I curse you with my last breath."

“I swear it,” said the Cappadocian, solemnly.

The vehemence of feeling was too much for exhausted nature; the voice of the dying man grew feebler and feebler as he painfully syllabled the last horrid sentences, until his companion had to lean close over him to catch the faint accents. At last it ceased altogether, and the silence was broken only by his laborious breathing, whilst the dread change of incipient dissolution swept over his grim features.

The Cappadocian mused as he gazed upon the wasted limbs and ghastly countenance.

“And this may be the end also of all my hopes, of all my dreams of ambition, of my toilsome search into futurity. This friendless poverty, this dog’s death! Never, never—it cannot be! To be allowed so much and no more; such a glimpse of coming prosperity, and to perish ere it come! Ah! that there were some more certain sign—some assurance of success beyond the mute language of the stars! The gods have granted such to men before now.”

As the thought passed through his mind, the door which led by a ladder staircase to the upper chamber swung open, and disclosed a young girl standing on the lower step.

CHAPTER VII.

THE GIFT OF GOD.

THE beauty of this girl, as she appeared framed in the dark doorway, was startling. It was as though a messenger from heaven had descended into the chamber of death at the mental prayer of the Cappadocian.

A single white garment fastened at the neck and waist, and reaching to the small, bare feet, a robe such as graces the purest conceptions of Greek art, allowed its clinging drapery to express clearly the exquisite roundness of the young limbs and the perfect symmetry of the slender form; whilst a slight disarrangement of the folds permitted a glimpse of a nascent bust which rivalled the linen in whiteness. A mass of bright tresses, crisp and wavy, over a low wide forehead, was gathered up behind the delicate ears and temples, and carelessly restrained with a ribbon, leaving the silky undulations to ripple down below her waist. There was the suspicion of a frown where the straight, sensitive

nose left the forehead, or rather a slight fulness at the inner corner of either eyebrow, imparting a strangely thoughtful expression to the young face. The eyes were marvellous; liquid and lustrous, the lids forming a perfect oval, fringed above and below with long dark lashes; in the subdued light of the room they appeared almost too large for the mask. A caviller for exact proportion might also have objected that the mouth and chin were slightly in excess, but the full ripeness of the one and the soft curve of the other were bewilderingly beautiful.

It was little wonder that, as this vision of loveliness revealed itself to the Cappadocian, the old formula, "I accept the omen," sprang to his lips. But on her part, at the sight of a stranger, the girl hesitated and drew back, opening her magnificent eyes to their widest; but their glance fell presently upon the motionless figure in the bed, and with a low cry she came hastily forward.

"My father! is he worse? Are you a physician, sir? Pray tell me how he is."

John shook his head. "My child," he said, kindly enough, "it is useless to conceal the truth. There is no hope; before morning you will have no father."

He watched with compassionate curiosity this young delicate creature thus brought face to face with death—with ghastly, repulsive dissolution.

His meetings with Acacius had, for prudential motives, never taken place at the Cyprian's house, and beyond having seen the girls casually some years before, when they were mere children, and received various communications from Acacius through their now dead brother, who was considerably older, John had never come in contact with the Cyprian's family; nor had he dreamed that the obscure dwelling contained a gem like the maiden before him. He watched her. She did not lament, or weep, or tremble, or betray any sign of emotion beyond a slight change of colour, but glided to the bedside, and stooping, clasped one of the gaunt hands of the dying man in her own rosy palms; her young beauty contrasting painfully with the shattered wreck of humanity over which she bent.

“Father!” she said, in her musical accents, “it is I, Theodora. Will you not speak to me?”

Theodora indeed! verily the gift of God! was the thought which passed through the Cappadocian's mind.

A slight tremor agitated the frame of Acacius, but he made no response.

“Can you do nothing for him, sir?” she pleaded, turning to John.

“Your father is past the aid of any mortal, my poor child,” said he. “I am no physician, but it requires little knowledge to be only too sure of that.”

The Cappadocian made no attempt to gloss over the grim truth. He felt that commonplace words of hope or consolation would be thrown away upon the singular self-possession of Theodora. As he spoke the woman Hermia, who had admitted him to the house, drew back the curtain and entered.

“Ay,” she answered him, “you are right. God have mercy on him ! his miseries are nearly ended in this world. And a wretched ending too, after the grand dreams which have plagued his poor brain for many a day. You have been kind to him and his in their troubles—Heaven forbid that I should deny it—but I would to God that some good Christian had been with him at the last. It may be that God will judge him lightly. Rough, fierce, and unbeliever as he was, he was a good father and served his masters right well. A poor recompense they gave him ! Ah ! they killed him ; they murdered him, I say, as surely as if they had let loose his wild beasts upon him, or cut his throat, as they have done to many a better man. And you here, Theodora ! ” she ran on, softening her tone as she turned to the young girl, who still caressed the passive hand of her father. “ You had better be in your bed, child, for any good you can do. Come, poor lamb, let me take you back.”

“ May I not stay, dear Hermia ? ” pleaded Theodora, tenderly. “ I am not frightened. He was always so kind and gentle to me. Of what

is my father dying, sir ? ” she added abruptly, turning to John.

The Cappadocian was somewhat taken aback at the plain question. “ It is hard to say, my child,” he replied at length, “ or rather to explain. A doctor might call it atrophy. His constitution has given way, and nothing will nourish it.”

“ And he was always so strong,” said the girl.

“ It is not at all hard to say,” asserted Hermia ; “ and whatever fine name the doctors may give it, I call it a broken heart. Savage as he was he had his weak spot, like all of us.”

“ But you said they had murdered him, Hermia.”

“ And I say it again,” exclaimed the foolish, well-intentioned woman.

“ What do you mean ? ” continued Theodora, steadily. “ Who has, and how ? I must know. What does she mean, sir ? ” and she turned again to John, with a look of extraordinary earnestness in her great, calm eyes.

He felt forced to answer simply. “ Your neighbour believes that the shock of losing his office under the Green Faction was the origin of your father’s illness.”

“ Give it the right name,” cried Hermia excitedly. “ Of being turned out at a moment’s notice, after years of faithful service, disgraced and penniless ; and left to die like a dog, without one of them

raising a finger or wagging a tongue in his behalf."

"Is this true, sir?" inquired Theodora, with the same irresistible gaze of appeal.

"It may be so," answered John. "There is no doubt that he was shamefully treated by his patrons, and he felt it keenly; but——"

"No 'buts,'" interrupted Hermia again. "It stabbed him to the heart. He never held up his head afterwards, and you know it."

"This painful discussion is out of place and unprofitable," said John; "we had better discontinue it." He was looking at Theodora. He saw her head sink as if in thought, and a strange glitter come into her eyes, while the lines of the young mouth set and hardened, until he was startled at the likeness to her father. "What is likely to be the destiny of this remarkable girl?" he said to himself.

Obtuse Hermia would probably have had the last word, but at this moment there was a tremendous knocking at the outer door, and a shrill feminine voice was heard demanding admission, accompanied by the gruff tones of a man in apparent expostulation.

"It is that she-devil and her lover," ejaculated Hermia. "Go to your bed, Theodora; it is your stepmother. Be quick!"

"I will not go," said the girl, resolutely. "Let her in; she shall not separate me from my father while he is on earth."

“ Nay, but go, child, I implore you ; in Heaven’s name, go. You know her violence, and if she be in one of her moods, or has been drinking, God knows what may happen.”

“ I care not ; I will not go,” reiterated Theodora.
“ Let her in.”

The knocking was now renewed with double force, and the blows resounded through the empty street.

“ Hermia, let her in at once,” said the Cappadocian ; “ she will alarm the neighbourhood, and we shall have the patrol down upon us. Stay, I would sooner not be seen here. Where can I go ? ”

Hermia pointed to the door by which Theodora had entered.

“ Good ; it will serve. Remember I am close at hand, child, if you need assistance.”

But directly she was left alone with her father the girl glided across to where his sword hung suspended from the bison’s horns, and drawing the blade from the scabbard, returned and seated herself on the low bed by Acacius, concealing the weapon under the bear-skin coverlet.

Hermia took the hand-lamp, went to the door and opened it, and a tall, brawny female stumbled with a curse over the threshold. Her features were somewhat coarse and massive, but nevertheless handsome ; now they were flushed and swollen with wrath and wine, and her thick black hair

hung tangled about her shoulders. She was accompanied by a man, who carried a lantern.

"Come in, fool!" she called out savagely, seeing that he hesitated to follow.

"He cannot enter," said Hermia, firmly. "Acacius is in the death-agony."

"I have no wish to intrude," said the man, drawing back with a kind of sulky apology, as if half ashamed of himself. "I will wait here, Marcia."

"Idiot! what are you afraid of?"

But Hermia decided the question by closing the door in his face and bolting it; and Marcia, with much bad language and wild threats of vengeance, strode off to the entrance of the inner room. "Is he not dead yet?" she exclaimed brutally, as she flung back the curtain. "Ay, there he lies, the old tiger! and the young cub beside him."

For some moments she stood swaying in the doorway, glaring at Theodora; and then the surest method of distressing the girl occurred to her instinctively.

"Take yourself off, you brat!" she yelled. "Back to your room this minute."

"My father still breathes," said the girl, "and I will not leave him while he does."

"You will not, you young devil—you will not? I say you shall. Begone, or by hell I will drag you out and fling you naked into the street!"

“That you shall never do—no, nor lay a finger on her while I am near,” said Hermia, hurrying bravely to the rescue. “Shameless that you are! Could you not wait a few hours until the breath was out of your lawful husband’s body, that you must come here with your fancy man to torment and bully this poor child, even beside her father’s death-bed?”

“Now curse you for a meddlesome fool!” retorted the virago. “You prevent me? You! I dare you. Stand aside, or I will strangle you first and her afterwards!” and she made a step towards Theodora.

But before Hermia could throw herself in the way, and as the Cappadocian opened the door behind which he had concealed himself, Theodora sprang up suddenly from the bed, and the lamp-light flashed on the bright steel as she held it pointed straight towards her stepmother’s heart.

“Come one step nearer,” she said, in a low, clear voice, “and I swear I will stab you.”

Marcia recoiled, as much from the tone and mien of the girl as from the naked blade, and her face grew livid with terror. “The young fiend!” she hissed out.

“Go!” went on Theodora, in the same quiet, metallic voice. “Leave this house, and I will do you no injury; remain but an instant longer, and you shall die where you stand, in the home you

have made wretched, and beside the husband you have wronged."

She spoke with her slender figure drawn up to its full height, her round white arm extended, and the heavy sword not even trembling in her hand; without passion, but pitilessly and authoritatively, as the white-robed angel of God confronting the incarnate demon.

Sobered and trembling all over, Marcia slowly drew back until she reached the curtain, and then with a yell of terror turned and fled. They heard her in her agony of fear tear and beat at the panels until she found the bolt, and with another awful scream she dashed out into the street and slammed the door behind her.

Not until then did Theodora drop the sword, and fell sobbing into Hermia's arms.

"Poor darling! poor darling!" said the kind-hearted woman, soothing and caressing the girl, with the tears running fast down her own cheeks. "Thank God that vixen is gone! And she won't come back in a hurry, I warrant. A pretty fright you gave her! God save us! did any one ever see the like? It is a mercy the place is not running with blood like a Circus. O Lord! O Lord! and to think of you breaking out so, my lamb! speaking so quietly and fiercely all at once, and holding out that great sword with your pretty white arm, as true and steady as your father might have done.

And you looked so like him, too—ah, so like!—for all that you are a fair, delicate girl, and he so black and ill favoured, poor man! But you would never have stabbed her, child?"

"I would have, if she had not gone," answered Theodora, looking up. "I would have killed her. Don't be angry with me, dear Hermia; it came over me all at once, and I couldn't help it. Don't be angry."

"I am not angry with you, my darling," sobbed Hermia; "I only wonder at you. I couldn't have done it. I would have fought tooth and nail with her if she had touched you, but I couldn't have stood up in that quiet way with a sword and meant to kill her."

"I hope I am not very wicked," sighed Theodora. "I could have done it easily then, and—and liked it."

"No, no, darling; never tell me that," said Hermia, with a shudder. But the Cappadocian came forward.

"My dear child," he said, "you did the very best thing you could have done under the circumstances, and saved an infinity of trouble. But not one in ten thousand would have acted as you did. If you live to be double your age I think you will make some figure in the world—whether for good or evil," he added, under his breath, "who shall say? Probably the latter."

"Ah, my God!" exclaimed Hermia, "look there!" and as she spoke rapid utterances began to pour from the mouth of the dying Acacius, which gradually resolved themselves into words. The Cyprian was transformed. It was no longer a feeble, listless wretch who lay there in a stupor that was half death. He had raised himself in the bed; his black eyes were wide open and dilated; his chest, shaggy as the bear's hide at which his lank fingers clutched fiercely, swelled and broadened; and the breath rushed out between his teeth in a hoarse growl that was barely human. An awful presence seemed to pervade the chamber. The dusky flame of the lamp mirrored itself in the red tiles as in a pool of blood, and as the light flickered on the walls, the forms of the mighty beasts depicted thereon seemed to quicken and stir, responsive to the final chord which thrilled through the brain of their dying master.

"See, see! now they grapple! Now they buckle to it!" yelled the horrid voice, bursting from the living corpse. "The lion? Never! The tiger wins, I tell you; the tiger wins! He is the strongest and fiercest beast I ever trained; but I have seen him cower before old Acacius, for all that. That was good. Gods! what a smashing blow! Well done, Numidian! Now 'tis grand—grand. Now they roll over and struggle in the dust. Ha, ha! what did I tell ye? the striped devil has him by the

throat. Did ye hear the fangs crunch?—right through the wind-pipe, I'll be sworn. Now for the blood. Mark, there it spouts! What did I tell ye? Halloo, halloo! tear him, lad. Ha! worry, worry, hold him! Curse you, hold him——!”

It was the last effort. The fire died out of the straining eyeballs, the jaw dropped, the hands relaxed their clutch, and he fell back upon the pillow; one strong convulsion passed over his frame, and the fierce soul of the Master of the bears went forth into the night.

CHAPTER VIII.

KAKOS KAPPA.

“Καραβοί, Κιλικίη, Κάπρας, τρία κίτρα κίτρινα.” So ran the old proverb, which, translated, means that Cappadocians, Cilicians, and Carians are the three worst C's.

The ostensible profession of our Cappadocian, John, was the bar; but his real business, which he managed, with consummate tact and cunning, to conceal from the eyes of the world, was that of an informer or government spy. At no period of history were the services of persons affiliated to this detestable class in greater demand than at the date of our story, and nowhere did they find a more congenial atmosphere or better pay than amid the complex intrigues of the Byzantine court.

The experience of modern times may teach us to realize the aversion and contempt with which these venomous hirelings were regarded by the rest of mankind; although, in our own land, thanks

be to Heaven, we may not so easily be able to comprehend the terror they inspired. Naturally enough, the barest suspicion of being connected with so infamous a calling was sufficient to oust a man from all decent society, and, consequently, to lessen his value as an agent. Reptiles are most dangerous when concealed. People learnt to be very circumspect in their sayings and doings before one through whose unsupported evidence they might find themselves suddenly deprived of their liberty, or mulcted of half their fortune. The talents, therefore, of a recognized spy were as often exhibited in his opportune and appropriate invention of a charge against those who were obnoxious to his employers as by any actual discovery. Still, however useful a false witness might be on occasion, genuine information was held by the authorities to be infinitely more valuable: to supply that information whilst maintaining a respectable position in the world, to retain the confidence of society and yet systematically to abuse it, required a rascal of no ordinary ability, and undoubtedly worthy of his hire.

Such a position the Cappadocian adventurer had attained, in spite of obscure origin and dubious antecedents, of an imperfect education and unprepossessing person. It was uphill work to begin with. There were few on whom, at first sight, he did not produce an unfavourable impression, and

as few whom, on further acquaintance, he did not manage to cajole into forgetting it. The instinct of mankind was against him, but his tact and perseverance triumphed over instinct.

As for his practice at the bar, it was at the best third rate. On his first arrival in the city he had combined with it another means of attaining notoriety and paying his way, of which we know something already and shall hear more presently; pretending—and in this pretence he was thoroughly earnest—to some scientific insight into futurity. In a society as credulous and superstitious as that of Christian Constantinople this amalgamation of pleader and prophet was not unsuccessful; long after John had abandoned his practice in the latter character, the tradition of it invested him with a glamour of mysterious interest, and enthusiasts would allude to him as to one who, had he been so minded, might have taken rank beside the gifted seers of antiquity. Later on, the large sums which he drew from the secret service fund, as the wages of many a dirty transaction, allowed him to assume a fair position among the youth of Constantinople, and in the absence of accurate information respecting his antecedents, the supposition of private resources passed unchallenged.

But these successes conduced in only a small degree to the furtherance of his ambitious projects, which were boundless. Those who take advan-

tage of the weaknesses of the great, and minister to their evil actions, must be content to receive their immediate reward, and, however much dust they may throw in the eyes of society in general, to remain objects of suspicion and distrust to those whom they have served.

John, however, was not the man to be daunted by trifles or abashed by the cold shoulder. On the broad principle that more opportunities were to be found and more money made in high places than low, he continued to hang about the skirts of the court, mingling with the thousand supernumeraries of Byzantine state, snubbed by many, tolerated by some, and admitted to a footing of hollow friendship by a few; his self-sufficiency always unshaken, his nerves ever steady, and his keen, vigorous intellect constantly on the watch for a chance of thrusting himself forward. As might be expected, the strong individuality of the man gradually asserted itself. He began to be recognized as a rough diamond—a person of great originality and independence of character, full of eccentricities and extreme views, but of sterling merit. The freedom of his opinions, the very laxity of his sentiments on matters of religion and morality, which he never attempted to disguise, were accepted as evidences of a kind of spurious honesty—of at least an absence of hypocrisy—and this was more serviceable to him than a spotless

reputation is to most men. He was gifted with a flexibly sonorous voice, and a forcible, if rude, eloquence, and even the brusqueness of his style told in his favour, as contrasted with the insidious elegance and polished rhetoric of the more fashionable counsel of the day.

But no one as yet suspected him of possessing those extraordinary powers which eventually raised him to be the favourite minister of one of the greatest sovereigns that ever sat upon the throne of the East. Nevertheless, he began to make his mark in his own peculiar fashion. His accurate judgment and far-sightedness were widely acknowledged, his sayings were quoted, and his advice sought by the gilded youth of the city, and there were few topics on which the opinion of the big-headed, heavy-jawed Cappadocian was not esteemed by them as oracular. But at the time when we make his acquaintance he had not succeeded in setting his foot upon the first round of the political ladder; the smallest taste of the sweets of office had been denied to him. To us, who have the privilege of being behind the scenes, this fact may not be as surprising as it was to many of his acquaintances who considered him a neglected man, and marvelled at the short-sightedness of the authorities in passing him over. But it was very galling to the Cappadocian himself. He had become an informer partly from a natural genius for intrigue

in any shape, partly from an innate hostility to his fellow-creatures generally, but chiefly because to a man who had no patrimony, no interest, and no principle, it presented a sure and rapid means of making money. The turpitude of the occupation was not in the least offensive to his moral nature, but he was keenly conscious of the danger which attended it; that at any moment a false step might precipitate him into a gulf out of which it would be impossible to clamber. Once fallen, it might at least require years of laborious exertion to reinstate him even in his present position.

Therefore his immediate ambition was to obtain one of the many snug berths in the Treasury or Home Office, or under the Count of the Private Estate, where, what with salary, fees, bribes, and perquisites, a man of even ordinary ability could scarcely fail in realizing a handsome income. This would enable him to escape from his present occupation, and place him in a position of permanent respectability. Moreover, John was one of those enviable persons who feel confident that if they can once get a firm grip of the lower branches, it is only a matter of time to hoist themselves to the top of the tree.

Like most men totally devoid of religion, he was superstitious. Even in times which are recent by comparison with those of which I write, it is strange to observe how repeatedly a strong belief in

magic, witchcraft, astrology, palmistry, divination, and the like, existed in conjunction with the highest practical abilities. The relics of the belief feebly survive amongst us to the present day, but on the whole we can laugh at such things nowadays, and associate them only with gross ignorance and a low standard of intellect; but in former times they were serious truths. The superstition of the Constantinopolitans was extraordinary. With them the commonest incidents of the day were carefully noted, and accepted as omens of good and evil. Thus to step over the threshold inadvertently with the left foot was sure to bring ill luck, but it might be cancelled if the first person met in the street was an improper character: to encounter instead a virtuous young lady, or, still worse, one of those consecrated damsels who were termed "Virgins of the Church,"—a species of home-fed nuns,—rendered the case hopeless. The crowing of a cock, the mewing of a cat, the bark of a dog, the squall of a child, or the sneeze of a friend, occurring at a wrong moment, betokened imminent disaster.

From such petty superstitions as these the Capadocian was indeed tolerably free, but he had in his youth devoted much time to the study of deeper mysteries, and the science which tempted him beyond all others, was that of astrology. Destiny, fatality, presentiment, are ideas which in all ages have had strong attractions for men of great

mental calibre, and these were cardinal points in the adventurer's creed.

But like many, even in the present day, who profess an actual religion, he never allowed the peculiar convictions which served him in the place of one to interfere with any course of action that seemed for the moment the most advantageous. His cool head and perfect unscrupulousness enabled him without hesitation to abandon one line and adopt another as easily as men change their garments. "Never stand still," was his favourite dictum. "The fool waits for the tide, the wise man anticipates it."

At first his belief in the splendid destiny of the house of Acacius, Master of the bears, influenced him strongly, and the hold which he acquired by his predictions over the mind of the Cyprian furnished him with an able and devoted instrument in the prosecution of the minor intrigues in which he later became involved. But as time went on, and the ambition of the adventurer, conscious of his own powers, aimed at greater things, he began to take a less enthusiastic view of his own prophecies, and with the death of Acacius, following that of his son, his faith in them almost expired also. It was partially resuscitated by the sudden appearance of Theodora, and her subsequent conduct. She made a double appeal to his superstition, and—for his vices were manifold—his sensuality. He saw in her a girl

of unusual strength of character, who might possibly become the hitherto uncertain nucleus of the grand fortunes he had predicted; he saw in her also a helpless orphan, of extraordinary beauty, whom—but we can learn something of his meditations on this and other points by following him to the retirement of his chamber, where he sits with two manuscript volumes upon the table before him. The one which he is consulting at the moment, and the pages of which are thickly dotted with strange signs, symbols, and characters interspersed among the strange handwriting, is a copy of an abstruse treatise on Chaldean astrology by Julius Firmicus, and would most certainly be unintelligible to the mass of readers; but a glimpse into the other would as certainly enlighten them to no small extent, and cause the heart of many a placid, unsuspecting citizen to jump into his throat. This volume is neither more nor less than the note-book of the informer—a villainous ledger! Therein is set forth, opposite to a long catalogue of names well known in Byzantine circles, every scrap of information respecting each individual which could possibly be of use—notes of property, habits, and occupations, abstracts of conversations, memorandums of suspicious expressions, and advanced opinions, political and religious; while a neat insertion of figures here and there—for he was most business-like—serves to mark the cases in which the

dishonest exertions of the Cappadocian have been satisfactorily acknowledged.

“It is useless,” he murmurs, as he closes the treatise of Julius Firmicus. “There is no error in my scheme; in the case of Acacius the conjunctions are unmistakable, but not conclusive. I cannot arrive at any closer result. If I had only sufficient data to work the nativity of Theodora, the missing link might be supplied; but the absence of her father at her birth is fatal. They cannot even speak positively as to the day. As for her sisters, Comito and Anastasia, they are but commonplace, comely girls, and their horoscopes, separately and collectively, barren of all but the feeblest indications. No; it is altogether too vague to rely upon, the improbabilities are too great. Had the boy lived, that would have been something; but a girl, a pauper orphan, and in her condition of life, with that virago for a stepmother—her own mother, too, an actress, and dying without the necessary farce of re-baptism; her father a pagan—why the law itself denies to the daughter her only chance, that of a decent marriage. What is the best that can befall her, or the worst, according to one’s view of the question? To be taken up by the religious party, to be thoroughly snubbed, and made into a discontented respectable nonentity for the rest of her existence, or to become a Lais, a Phryne, or possibly an

Aspasia—well enough in their way. Who, by-the-by, will act Pericles ? I cannot wait for the development. It is a pity, too. What force of character she has ! How fearless and earnest, and yet how tender ! And she is lovely beyond expression—worthy of the island of Venus. The Paphian queen may be proud of her subject. If I am any judge she will resemble the goddess in more ways than one. Those marvellous eyes and that mouth ! Whatever that girl may take to, there will be no half measures with her. She is more likely to mar fortunes than to make them. Well, she would be a fair excuse for a man's forgetting even ambition for a while. Would take some taming, no doubt ; but the harder the task the sweeter the prize. Pshaw ! what am I dreaming of ? To attach one's self to the fortunes of a pauper ; to loiter in one's path over even such an exquisite toy as that ! Never ! First success, and the wealth which inevitably attends it, and then—and not till then—unbridled enjoyment. Let me but once reach the point to which I aspire, and every luxury which gold can buy or power extort shall contribute to my gratification. It may be late, but my zest will be the keener for delay. All shall be mine ; authority, magnificence, the homage and envy of thousands, the pleasures of revenge and punishment, the indulgence of every passion and sense, the love of women—bah ! the

only part of love worth having—possession. Gold can buy the body, ay, and the heart too, often enough—as much of it as a sensible man requires. In any case rifled honey is sweetest. Ah ! a man is nothing until he can be criminal with impunity."

And with this amiable sentiment he turned to the other volume, and continued musing as he ran his eye over its pages.

"The last year has been a profitable one. I have succeeded beyond hope, and my credit with the world stands well; but it cannot last. No one but myself could have carried on so long. The strain is too great; the crash must come one of these days, if I do not free myself. I will close with Severus on my own terms—a round sum down and a good appointment, with plenty of work; no fat sinecure for me. I must show them the stuff I am made of.—Acacius' hint about Giton and his dozen choice comrades, ready at half an hour's notice, is worth noting.—Eccebolus—ahem ! I could make an example of that imprudent young man if I chose; but his cook and cellar are perfect, and his house the pleasantest in the city. He is worth more to me as he is; for the present he shall not be disturbed.—Justinian—monk ! prig ! ascetic ! I ought to detest, and yet I admire him. He is resolute and consistent after his own fashion; and, I firmly believe, the man of the future. Yes, Acacius was right; if the guards only stand by Justin,

Hypatius is out of the race, and when the old general dies it will be, 'Hail, Justinian! Cæsar Imperator!' Justin cannot live many years; his constitution is broken, and they say the wound in his thigh is incurable.—For these bravoes, who have formed a league to support the Dacians—the Brotherhood of the Rising Sun: it seems a petty conspiracy at the best; but it might be developed, and there are times when a stroke of a dagger is worth all the diplomacy in the world, and a secure retreat all the gold in the treasury. Is it worth my while to claim membership with such a fraternity? Well, I have a year to consider. Who can say what may turn up before then? And now to settle with Hermia about those girls. My mind is made up. Let them appear as suppliants. I will not be burdened with the responsibility longer than I can help—let them appear! If they excite the pity or attract the attention of any whose protection is worth having, it is my doing. They will owe their good fortune to me, and I may profit by it. If they swim, I can but hold on; if they sink, the sooner I shake myself free the better. My sentiments are no doubt inhuman, selfish, contemptible, and so forth. So be it. Existence is a continual struggle against one's neighbours—every man for himself. Let them appear! I shall fulfil my oath, and the unquiet shade of my staunch old pagan will be satisfied.

Ah ! there is a loss. How shall I replace him ?" And John closed the volume and went forth.

At Hermia's earnest entreaties, Theodora and her sisters, Comito and Anastasia, had been placed under her care until something could be definitely settled as to their future. The honest woman was sorely troubled on this point, and with good reason. The position of three orphan girls, nearly destitute, one eminently beautiful, the others good-looking, could not fail to be otherwise than dangerous in the profligate city of Constantinople. Hermia herself was in too humble circumstances to admit of her permanently undertaking the charge of them in addition to her own family, and she could not venture to expect a continuance of the aid afforded, under the first impulse of pity, by some of the old comrades of their father. Reckless and improvident, living from hand to mouth, now reduced to the lowest depths of impecuniosity, now lavishing their sudden gains upon the taverns and gambling tables, these men were the very last upon whom it was possible to rely. Nor had Hermia much confidence in the result of the public appeal to sympathy, so earnestly enjoined by Acacius on his death-bed. But when the Cappadocian insisted that he was bound by his oath to see the experiment carried out, she had no better course to suggest. For the solemnity of the obligation

John had no great regard ; but it was convenient to him to recognize it in this instance.

After our glimpse into the privacy of the Cappadocian we shall be able to understand that it was with no little gratification he found Theodora ready, on behalf of herself and her sisters, to acquiesce in the scheme. Whatever may have been the real sentiments of Comito, who was a year older, and of the youngest, Anastasia, who was scarcely of an age to have a voice in the matter, they were instantly overruled by the fearless decision of Theodora.

“It was our father’s dying wish,” she urged in reply to poor Hermia’s remonstrances, “and anything is better than to remain as we are. They can but kill us, perhaps tear us in pieces. Let them ; you shall not hear me scream ! ”

At this a cry escaped from the timid Comito, and good Hermia fell to moaning. “Ah, no, child ! I dare say not ; but there are things worse than death.”

“I don’t believe it,” said Theodora, with a shake of her lovely head. “When one is young and nice-looking, and full of hope and longings for what might be and may be, there cannot be anything worse, except to remain as we are—poor and despised.”

“My darling ! ” sobbed Hermia, “beware of these sinful hopes and longings ; they beguile you, and will be your ruin.”

“Why are they sinful?” asked Theodora.

Poor Hermia was perplexed. She was conscious of a vague dread in her own mind, for which she could not find words, and she had certain stereotyped ideas about murmuring against Providence.

“Is it wrong to wish ourselves better off than we are?” continued the girl. “Does not poverty make people bad?”

“Sometimes, dear,” said Hermia gently, “if they do not resign themselves to God’s will, and pray for His help. Try to do so, child. Think of being jeered at and insulted, and forced, after all, to return to the poverty and obscurity you dread.”

“I won’t return, for one!” exclaimed Theodora. “I’ll turn actress, dancer, anything;” and in an irrepressible burst of pure animal spirits, she whirled pirouetting round the room; but stopped abruptly, looked for an instant at Hermia’s tearful face, and fell on her neck. “You dear old thing,” she cooed, nestling against the good woman’s cheek, “don’t look so miserable, and don’t think me ungrateful; I was only joking. If those horrid Greens won’t help us, I’ll come back and be a good girl, and work my fingers off for you.”

“And so will I,” added Comito, her blue eyes running over with sympathy.

Was it a smile or a sneer which played for one moment on the Cappadocian’s stolid features?

And so it was arranged that at the Venations, or slaughter of wild beasts which would take place in the Cynegium—after the procession to Triconchum, in remembrance of the miraculous fall of ashes—“the poor lambs,” as Hermia expressed herself, “should be prepared for the sacrifice.”

But if she could have overheard a conversation which took place some days after in another part of the city, and which we shall reserve for another chapter, she would have died sooner than have consented to the arrangement.

CHAPTER IX.

A WOMAN OF BUSINESS.

“DON’T distress yourself, my dear, and take things easily; depend upon it, everything will come right in the end.”

The speaker was a plump little woman about middle age, with a much-befrizzled head of yellow hair, and a smooth round face which bore witness to her having habitually taken things easily herself, and retained a considerable amount of vulgar pink-and-white comeliness; whilst her manner indicated a strong affectation of being still in the prime of youth and beauty.

Her companion, whom she was addressing, was that atrocious female Marcia, Theodora’s step-mother, looking, I rejoice to say, very nervous, subdued, and abject, and altogether changed since we last had the misfortune of meeting her. Her unpleasantly handsome face was pale and troubled, and there were traces of tears upon her cheeks.

“If you but knew how savage and brutal he has

turned since they rejected him ! ” she whimpered. “ He accuses me of deluding him by false hopes, and declares his failure is all owing to me. Yesterday he cursed the hour when he set eyes upon me ; and when I ventured to remonstrate, he caught up his whip and—— Ah, my God ! ” moaned the wretched creature, covering her face with her hands, “ he lashed me as if I was a dog.”

“ The brute ! ” muttered the little woman to herself ; but she said aloud, “ Well, Marcia, you must not expect husbands to be like lovers ; they never are. I wonder what your remonstrance was like ? To speak the truth, you had your turn once, and were pretty severe upon him. It must be very vexatious to have missed the appointment, and the Faction were a pack of fools not to elect him. If he is not as good a man as old Acacius, who was a wonder in his best days, he is worth half a dozen of Asterius, and, to my mind, the very man to keep wild beasts in order.”

The little woman chirruped out this encomium with so playful an air of innocence, that Marcia failed to appreciate the sarcasm ; or perhaps she was too dispirited to take any notice of it.

“ What is to become of me, Chrysomalla ? ” groaned the dejected virago.

“ What is to become of you ? ” echoed the other, throwing up her little fat hands in amazement ; “ what is to become of you ? Well, I never saw

such a transformation in my life! That is the way with you big, showy women. As long as you have it all your own way, and can do just as you please, you are very dragons; directly any one holds up a finger at you, there you are—as down-hearted as wet chickens. Look at me, now; do you suppose I have had no trouble in my day? My old man could be a brute with the best of them when he felt inclined; but I never knocked under—not I. Nobody knows better either what ups and downs mean than I do. Did I ever give in? Not a bit of it. I shouldn't be as I am now if I had. It was only the other day Opilio—he is the Prefect of Public Amusements, you know, my dear, and a great friend of mine—said to me, 'My dear Chrysomalla,' he said, 'what is your secret of eternal youth? I vow that you are younger and more bewitching than when you first appeared as Leda, and turned the heads of half the young men in the city.' 'Prefect,' said I, 'I'll tell you—at the same time you flatter me, for although my skin is as white as ever, I should be over stout for the part now—it lies in the heart. Always keep a good heart whatever happens, and you'll put off the wrinkles and crows'-feet for many a year.' "

"I am afraid of his killing me, though, one of these days," shuddered Marcia, refusing to be comforted by this cheerful anecdote. "I am horribly afraid of death."

“Killing you? Nonsense!” said Chrysomalla; “he knows better than that. His disappointment has made him rather vicious for the present; and you don’t go the right way to work with him. You see, my dear—excuse my saying it—you have made a mess of it altogether. If you had taken my advice you would never have married Acacius, but you always had a fancy for that strong, fierce kind of man; and he was well to do in those days. That was mistake number one. Well, he had a bad time of it, poor man; fierce and strong as he was, there was a weak spot, and you found it out. He couldn’t manage you; he could manage a lion or a tiger, but not a woman like you. Then you were harsh to his children, and made them hate you; mistake number two. Then you took up openly with Lysias—the same kind of man, without the weak spot—and made yourself the scandal of the quarter; mistake number three.”

“You might spare me,” sobbed Marcia.

“I am sparing you. I am not one to preach or call hard names. I say these things were mistakes; others might not use such a mild term. Then you took to this kind of thing too much, you know;” and pitiless Chrysomalla tossed up her hand in a significant manner; “and that is a mistake, Marcia, I advise you not to repeat, for Lysias himself is no drunkard, and there is a

good deal which a man may tolerate in a mistress and not in a wife."

"I began it to drown my thoughts," whined Marcia. "I did, indeed; and then it grew upon me. I have left it off now."

"I am glad to hear it," said Chrysomalla; "don't begin again. A comforting drop now and then does no harm, but never go beyond it. Well! then when you did return home it was to bully that unhappy girl Theodora, until she all but put a stop upon your ever making a mistake again. Mistake.— I don't know how many, I have lost count. Finally you marry Lysias, and find your master; and that may be a mistake or not, according to circumstances—it lies a good deal with yourself. It has been a mess, I say, from beginning to end; and now the only thing to do is to make the best of it."

"As if there was any best of it!" said Marcia sullenly.

"There is always a best of it," said Chrysomalla indignantly, "if people will only find it out."

Which was an excellent maxim; but straitlaced people might consider Chrysomalla's method of making the best of things somewhat objectionable, as we shall presently see.

"I have known you a long time, Marcia," she continued, "and I should like to be of service to

you. I tell you plainly I shall try to serve myself as well ; I always do. I am a woman of business ; not at all disinterested. You understand ? ”

“ I don’t see why you should be,” said Marcia ; “ I should be astonished if you were. Nobody ever is.”

“ Just so. Now, I have a plan to suggest. But first you require something to settle your nerves ; the comforting drop which I spoke about—no more. I expected to find you out of sorts, and I have brought it with me. You are looking quite ghastly. I don’t wonder at it, after—yesterday. I must speak to Lysias.”

“ No, no ! For God’s sake, don’t ! ” exclaimed Marcia ; “ you will only make him furious.”

“ I know what I am about,” replied Chrysomalla ; “ trust me. I never make men furious. If they are inclined that way, I have a knack of soothing them. Bless you ! I am not afraid of any man. Philotarion ! ” she called out, rising and opening the door, “ bring in the basket. You didn’t know I had set up a page, I dare say, like the great ladies ? I have, though, and a treasure I find him. His real name is Timothy, but that’s not fashionable enough. He was recommended by Antonina, Demas’s daughter ; his twin brother, Andreas, works for Baro the ferryman, who is her uncle. Now, there is a girl, if you like, who knows what she is about. Catch her making a fool of herself ; and

yet I could tell some funny stories about her. But I'm no gossip. Ah, here it is." And as she spoke a smart, rosy-cheeked boy entered the room, with a covered basket on his arm.

"Take out the bottle and open it, Philotarion, and be careful. I hope you haven't shaken it. Then go to the well and bring a jug of water. Now, Marcia, some glasses, and let us be comfortable. I can't do business without a little stimulant—it clears the head; but I never took a drop too much in my life, and I shall not let you. One got into the way at the theatre, you see; you couldn't get through those long parts which last more than half the day without it."

When the boy had carefully removed the pitch from the mouth of the capacious bottle, or rather glass jar, and drawn the cork, Chrysomalla exhibited a small label with sundry half-effaced characters upon it. "There," she said with unction, "that wine is nearly as old as myself, and the one has kept as well as the other. Well, almost. I am glad, though, they didn't fasten a label on me when I was born. What a perfume! I take but little, but I like that little to be of the best. I had this as a present from old Malchus; he often used to come down to our theatre on the sly. A pretty mess his nephew Sittas has got himself into! Sometimes, when I want the Prefect to be in an extra good humour, I give him a glass

of this, and he says there is none better in the city, no, not at Cæsar's table. Here is the water ; I hope it is cool. You can go, Philotarion ; I shall not want you. Go home, and keep out of mischief."

"And now——" resumed Chrysomalla, settling herself; but before she could get any further a heavy footstep was heard outside, and Marcia started up, trembling with fright.

"It is Lysias !" she gasped ; "he is coming in. My God ! what shall I do ? The wine ! the wine ! He swore that if he ever caught me again with——"

"Sit still, you idiot !" interrupted Chrysomalla, "and keep quiet ; leave him to me."

Lysias entered. A tall, powerful man, looking like a personified thunderstorm.

"At the old game again !" he cried savagely, catching sight of the wine and ignoring the presence of Chrysomalla, who sat with her back to him. "By hell, I'll put a stop to this !" and he was on the point of laying violent hands on the flask of precious Prefect-compelling liquid, when said Chrysomalla, quietly placing the tips of her small fingers on his arm—

"I'll trouble you to leave that alone, sir."

"Who are you, I should like to know," cried Lysias, turning on her fiercely, "who come into a man's house and encourage his wife to disobey orders ?"

"I do nothing of the kind," said Chrysomalla,

composedly. "I am an old friend, and I come to do her a good turn if I can ; and if I do bring something with me to keep her up a bit, she needs it after your treatment."

"Now, look you here, madam," said Lysias, with suppressed fury, "I'll trouble you not to meddle with that which doesn't concern you. I don't care an obole about your fine dress and your chains and rings. I hate busybodies. I don't want you here ; that is the long and short of it. The sooner you walk out of this house the less chance there will be of my bundling you and your cursed liquor into the street."

"Dear me, dear me !" cried the little actress, facing the bully, and surveying him much as a bright-eyed robin might survey an angry bull, while her tone became quite bird-like in its gentle querulousness, "what has put this big, strong man in such a bad temper ? I believe he is trying to frighten me. Do you know who I am, sir ? I am Chrysomalla, the ballet-mistress. I have a hundred young ladies of all kinds of tempers to keep in order, and I am never by any chance alarmed or excited ; so if you have any sense you will leave off blustering, which has no effect on me, and sit down. I have no intention of stirring until I have said my say. I came on purpose, and it will be as much to your advantage as to Marcia's to listen to me. So pray be reasonable, and make yourself as

pleasant as I am sure you can be when you like. Let me offer you some of this 'cursed liquor,' as you term it, which happens to be genuine Tænaotic, and thirty years old if it is a day. Look at the label."

If we conceive the aforesaid robin as alighting on the nose of the angry bull, and thence pouring its unpremeditated lay, the bird's conduct could scarcely appear more comically daring than did Chrysomalla's at this moment, or more perplexing to the irritated animal than was her placid address and demeanour to Lysias. The man was taken aback, his ferocity was neutralized; he was no more capable of further aggressiveness than the bull of goring the robin. And so, to the relief of Marcia, who sat by speechless and shaking in every limb, he answered with comparative mildness to the effect that he did not mean to be uncivil, but that there were some things which did try a man's temper, and one of them was——"

"I know, I know," interrupted Chrysomalla; "you need not particularize. Ask Marcia if I haven't been giving her a good scolding. But, come now, you must find a kind word for her; and pray don't let me hear of such very extreme measures on your part again. As if a good-looking fellow like you couldn't manage a woman without them!"

And thus this shameless little person acted as

peacemaker between these two other shameless persons, and restored temporary quiet to their much-vexed household ; for her own selfish and improper ends, no doubt ; but still let us hope that some minute blessing was scored to her account for the attempt, for she stood sadly in need of it. Moreover, I entreat the reader to recollect that I am writing of the sixth century. I say this apologetically, because the worst has to come.

“ I came here to speak about those step-children of Marcia’s,” said Chrysomalla, after peace had been cemented by a glass of the old Tænaotic, “ and I am not going to beat about the bush. As I said just now, I am a woman of business. Those children are a valuable property, and one that I should like to invest money in.”

“ That may be,” answered Lysias ; “ although I don’t quite see it. It is all very well to talk like that when you have got any money to invest, but as I have none how does it concern me ? ”

“ How ? because the property belongs to you, you dullest of men,” said Chrysomalla ; and her look and accent made the censure seem a compliment.

“ To me ? ” exclaimed Lysias, with an amiable grin. He was beginning to fancy this complete contrast to his own masculine, gloomy-faced wife a good deal. “ How do you make that out ? ”

“ They have no blood relations in the world that we know of ; they are Marcia’s step-children. You

are her husband ; perhaps you have forgotten it. If it were not for certain little irregularities which may be passed over, no one could raise the question of her not being the proper person to take charge of them."

"If I do," broke in Marcia, unable to control herself, "may——"

"Hush, hush ! pray don't be vehement. Let me continue. I shall try to make myself as little unpleasant as possible, but——"

"You would find it hard to make yourself anything but most agreeable," said Lysias, with a gallant air.

"Thank you ; wait until I try," said Chrysomalla somewhat shortly, glancing at Marcia, who looked dangerous again. "You must not pay compliments now. Let us be serious."

"I am," said Lysias, who was rapidly becoming, like the Prefect of Public Amusements, extra-good humoured.

"There is not the least likelihood," hurried on Chrysomalla, "that the Quæstor, even were he appealed to, would take the trouble to appoint another guardian—for three little beggars, forsooth. In any case, who is there to present the appeal ? Even supposing it were asserted—against all probability, I allow—that Acacius before his death had nominated Marcia, who would care to dispute it ?"

"The woman Hermia would for one," said Lysias, "and I know another who might."

"And who may that be?" asked Chrysomalla.

"Never mind; you finish what you have to say first."

"Very good. Then I say that there is not the remotest chance of Hermia or any other outsider having a voice in the matter. But Marcia here has conceived a strong dislike to these children, especially to Theodora. Originally, because their father was incapable of retaining her affections; afterwards, for other reasons which we need not specify, but which I acknowledge to be not unfair."

Chrysomalla felt the necessity of being guarded in her expressions. Her position was not unlike that of people who tread delicately, with stocking feet, in powder-factories, under the dread that a tiny particle of grit may cause an explosion and blow everything to atoms. This is a nineteenth-century illustration, but it may be pardoned for its aptness.

"Her dislike is unfortunately reciprocated," she went on. "Now, I think that it would be for the good of all parties if Marcia could bring herself to at least an appearance of better feelings; it would make matters go more smoothly."

"What are you asking of me?" exclaimed Marcia. "Have you forgotten all I told you? It is a wonder that I am sitting here."

“Granted, my dear; but you must allow that your own conduct was—was very injudicious,” replied the actress, throwing a side glance at Lysias.

“Of course it was,” said he, plunging at the lure like a pike. “I am not thin-skinned, but I can tell you I feel pretty well ashamed of myself when I think of that night. I ought to have prevented her going in. But I was a fool and she——”

“There, there, that will do; say no more,” pleaded Chrysomalla, feeling secure of the husband’s support at least. “Now, Marcia, please attend to what I am going to tell you; you have an excellent judgment if you will but use it. It was only the other day that the Prefect of Public Amusements said to me”—this was the actress’s pet formula—“‘My dear Chrysomalla, our theatrical resources are at a very low ebb. We never make such hits nowadays as we used to—as with your Leda, for example. How do you account for it? Can the taste for the spectacular drama be on the decline? Those female acrobats from Persia which I introduced into the pantomime were tolerably successful, and the Ascalon wrestlers—the Arabian fire-eaters did passably well; but the public are growing fastidious. Our most dainty dishes, the prettiest flesh and blood we can procure, seems to pall upon it. What is to be done? We require somebody or something that may become a

positive rage. Can you not help us? It would be well worth your while.' Those are his very words, and this last sentence," added Chrysomalla, "I am responsible for extending to every one here present."

"That is what I call speaking to the purpose," said Lysias.

"I generally do. It is a knack I have. I was not prepared with an answer at the time, but I think I see my way to one now, with your assistance. I have taken some pains to inquire about those children, and contrived to get a good look at them—on the sly, of course—at the bath. Comito is a pretty thing enough, fair and blue-eyed; she will do. But Theodora is the most beautiful girl in every respect that I ever set eyes upon."

"I begin to understand you," said Marcia.

"Naturally you do. I knew I had only to trust to your good sense. Now, the mother of those girls was an actress herself—a pantomimist. She was a Cyprian as well as Acacius. They had known each other from childhood. The poor thing was killed by a fall from the aiorema, which gave way when she was descending as Venus. She broke her neck, and was picked up stone dead; having never been re-baptized, mark you! Her husband, Acacius, was a notorious infidel. You see, therefore, that the law, which is so charitable and Christianlike to us of the profession, will compel the daughters to follow their mother's calling."

“ Unless,” said Lysias, “ the district visitors get hold of the case, and the girls are taken in hand by some of the pious ladies. What will you do then, madam ? ”

“ Then,” said Chrysomalla with decision, “ I shall not interfere. Far be it from me. Let the pious ladies look after them ! Let them feed, clothe, instruct, and find occupation for them ! Let them keep them thoroughly poor, miserable, over-worked, and religious all their days ! I must look elsewhere.”

“ And supposing the other way ? ”

“ Then it would be a thousand pities, if we can prevent it, to let any one go and tattle to the Quæstor, cut us out, and pocket the profits. I should break my heart if another management snapped up those girls. And it might end in their going to the bad altogether. Heaven knows they grind us actresses down into the mire and call us everything that is infamous, while all the time they doat upon us and gloat over us, and can’t get on without us ; but there is a deeper mire, after all.”

“ Ay, ay,” assented Lysias, “ you are right there.”

“ I am not a hard-hearted nor a very greedy woman, though I always try to help myself. I would not wantonly give any one a push in the wrong direction. What I say is—the stage is what those girls must and will take to, and upon

my word I see nothing better for them ; beggars can't be choosers. Therefore, let us secure them. Were you going to speak ? ”

“ Not unless you have quite finished,” said Lysias ; “ but I have something to tell also.”

“ One minute, then. As to the instruction the girls will require ; that is my business. Comito is old enough to appear as soon as she can ; Theodora, say in six months or a year. I should like her to be thoroughly well taught. We need not trouble about poor little Anastasia yet ; she can wait upon her sisters. Now, all I ask of you, Marcia, is to try and let bygones be bygones. It cannot be so hard, looking at both sides of the question.”

“ Ah ! but it is hard, though,” replied Marcia, doggedly. “ But perhaps I may try ; at least, it will not be much harder than what you have undertaken. I don't envy you the management of that young demon, Theodora.”

“ You never made a greater mistake. I shall enjoy it thoroughly. What a relief a girl of some originality, with her face and figure, will be after the many commonplace, dull, gawky, half-shaped animals I have to mould into goddesses, nymphs, and heroines, and to inspire with a sense of the artistic ! Not but what there are some treasures amongst them. Take Indara, for instance, the Gaditanian—supple and tawny as a tiger, and nearly as wicked and dangerous. Most people

would have given her up in despair. Her temper was fearful. But I saw she had real talent, and I persevered. Look at her now ! equal to anything. Comedy, farce, pantomime, it is all one to her. And then her way of moving ! Did you ever see her do the bee dance, or the old Spartan bibasis ? No ? That is a sight. How I do chatter when I get on this subject ! ”

“ And which line would you put the girls into ? ” asked Lysias, who liked it.

“ Well, that of course must depend on circumstances. I don’t know quite enough of them ; but at a guess—and I am seldom wrong—I should say Comito for broad farce. She is a bright-looking, merry-eyed girl. White and plump too, for the matter of that, and would do well in other ways. Theodora would be wasted on farce or comedy ; but I shall put her through a course of drudgery on principle. If shape goes for anything she ought to make a first-rate dancer, and now that we have given up the masks, she would be glorious in pantomime or spectacle, and a very queen of gymnorchestry. You see, besides her lovely figure, she has what is so rare nowadays—real soul in the face. She doesn’t require speech. Fancy her, for example, in some of the mythological parts ! As Galatea, the ivory statue waking to life, as Andromeda chained to the rock, or as Europa on the bull ! How she could express the emotions—

surprise, joy, despair, terror, hope, rapture—with-out uttering a syllable!"

" You are enthusiastic," said Marcia, coldly. " There is one thing I may as well tell you. Acacius kept a sharp eye upon those girls, and never let them get into mischief. You will find them unpleasantly modest and well conducted. That may be the reason of our mutual antipathy. I am afraid, though, it will be a serious obstacle to your schemes."

" That remains to be seen. Why should it be ? I am not in the least afraid myself. Let us once get the register signed on their behalf, and leave the rest to me. Do you suppose there can possibly be an objection to virtue, the rarest and most precious of all commodities ? Why, my dear, if one could but be sure of its lasting, what attraction can you conceive so great as a pantomimist of surpassing beauty and spotless reputation ? It would be the wonder of the age. We should draw every soul in the city, from various motives. No, no ; it is too good to expect."

" Well, I only meant to warn you ; you are so sanguine. If you do not foresee any difficulty about making them do as you wish, there is an end of it."

" I may foresee difficulties, but I shall overcome them. As a rule, I prefer girls well conducted to begin with. They are less troublesome ; but you

don't get one in fifty who is, unless they are mere babies. We never meddle with the private affairs of our young ladies as long as they are punctual, do as they are bid, and don't quarrel or give themselves airs inside the theatre. Of course you know that if they are very refractory we are empowered to employ certain very strong arguments ; but we are rarely obliged to resort to them. And now forgive me " (this to Lysias) ; " I see something is burning your tongue ; pray let me hear it, and relieve yourself."

" Well," said Lysias, with a chuckle, " you are clever, but you don't find out everything. I should be sorry, for all our sakes, to disconcert your plans ; but I have been making inquiries also, and I hear that those girls are to appear at the next Venations as suppliants, and implore the pity of the Factions and general public."

" Who told you that ? " asked Chrysomalla, sharply.

" A friend on whom I can rely. I thought it best to be cautious, so I got her to pump Hermia in a casual way, and she let it all out."

" All what ? Tell me at once."

" That it was their father's dying wish, and that the children have made up their minds to it."

" Which means that Theodora has. Just what I should expect of her. But there must be some

one else in the affair. That old fool Hermia is not equal to it alone."

"There is. John the Cappadocian."

"What has he to do with it?"

"It seems that long ago he chose to foretell a brilliant destiny for Acacius and his family—ha, ha, the idea!—and, finding himself wrong, he thinks the least he can do is to give them a helping hand, and fulfil their father's last injunctions. Acacius, I believe, got him to swear that he would."

"Lawyer John turning philanthropist! What next? Now, what is the meaning of that, I should like to know?"

"I dare say you would, but I can't assist you. You know as much about it as I do. Rather annoying, isn't it?"

Chrysomalla reflected before she answered. Then she said quietly, "Not in the least. I don't know how far the Cappadocian is mixed up with those girls; but I can see one thing plainly, he is trying to wash his hands of them. If he were really charitable he would never back them in such a wild idea, oath or no oath. There is something wrong, depend upon it. Never trust me again if there isn't. But it is all in our favour."

"Then you don't think it spoils your plan?" cried Lysias peevishly, conscious that his intended surprise had fallen flat.

"Not at all. Answer me now. What will be the

effect of those girls appearing as suppliants in the Cynegium? Think well."

It was Lysias's turn to reflect. "There will be an infernal row," he said at last, with sudden inspiration.

"How so?"

"Some one is sure to pity and cheer them; as certainly some one is sure to insult and hoot them. It doesn't matter what it is so long as there is something to quarrel over. A stray dog will do. The Factions have not had a set-to for some time, and they are eager for it. I say again, there will be an infernal row."

"And no doubt you are right. Oh, you men! what would you do without woman's wit to sharpen your own against? You may be steel, but we are the whetstones; you wear us out, but we put an edge on you. There will be a row; good. Then is our chance. See! their patron exposes them, perhaps deserts them; the Factions squabble over them. The police, forewarned, appear at the critical moment. Lysias, who has just been refused their father's situation, generously steps forward; he bears no ill will; their stepmother receives them with open arms; irregularities are forgotten in the general commotion; grand finale, general applause!"

"You are a wonderful woman!" exclaimed Lysias, in high glee.

“ Not at all ; I merely use my common sense. I hope you comprehend now. Marcia and yourself must make a point of being at hand, and you must act according to circumstances—judiciously. But I shall see you again before the Venations, when I have thought matters over. If any hitch occurs, I will say a word to my tame Prefect, and he will say a word to the Quæstor, and all will be arranged. Between ourselves, Opilio is part owner of the state lease under which our people farm the theatre, therefore he has an eye to his private interests as well as his official credit. They are bound, under heavy penalties, to provide proper entertainment, and keep the performances up to the mark. And now, my friends,” said Chrysomalla, rising and taking a hand of each of her companions, “ I must leave you, for I have to superintend a rehearsal. Let me entreat you to try and live harmoniously ; these domestic quarrels are so sad. Be sure better times are coming. Lysias, will you be good enough to call me a litter ? There is a stand at the end of the street, and please choose a clean one.”

CHAPTER X.

JUSTINIAN.

BEFORE the pale gleam on the great gilded colossus of Apollo Constantine, which towered aloft in the midst of the Forum, had heralded the radiance of the coming dawn ; while the night-mists were still creeping dank and chilly upon the current of the Bosphorus, and the only sounds which broke the silence of the Imperial city were the measured pacing of the sentinels, the hooting of owls in the palace gardens, and the distant carol of some belated reveller, Justinian, the son of Sabatius the Dacian, and nephew of Justin, had quitted the extremely hard couch on which it was his fancy to repose, and applied himself assiduously to his matutinal studies.

There were very few like Justinian in Constantinople ; there have not been many like him in all time.

He was now in his twenty-ninth year. At an age when most men still cling to the follies and

pleasures of youth, or when, at best, experience has taught them to make a judicious selection of those which they prefer, and in a social position which would have warranted and excused an unusual amount of self-indulgence, he was remarkable for the excessive simplicity of his habits, his unremitting devotion to study, and the perfect control he exercised over his passions and appetites.

It was, indeed, asserted by many that he was wholly without the latter. They set him down as a cold, passionless man, exempt by nature from those weaknesses which both in their suppression and indulgence entail so many troubles on ordinary mortals. In this they were mistaken, as we are always likely to be when we form such a diagnosis of either man or woman. The character is distinctly alien to human nature. There are, indeed, cases where an ultra-lymphatic temperament induces complete paralysis of the emotions—a torpor both intellectual and physical—but these are of rare occurrence, and instantly to be recognized. A healthy mind in a healthy body is never passionless. Moreover, unnatural abstinence frequently implies unusual temptation. We may judge of the strength and ferocity of the captive by the care displayed in his restraint. And yet it is often the fashion to deny people the credit of continence by assuming their apathy.

Travellers in Iceland tell us of an inaccessible

region called the Skapta Jokul. Those who from a distance look towards it gaze upon a vast solitude of cliff, glacier, and snowfield—frigid, lifeless, soundless. Let the adventurer attempt to penetrate but a little way into its mystery, he is startled by the trembling of the solid earth beneath his feet, by the glow of subterranean fires through the rifts of the ice and granite, and shudders to understand how resistless and scathing would be the outbreak were those strong barriers to give way. There are not a few people in the world who resemble the Skapta Jokul, both in their outward and inner existences. It is rash to speak confidently of extinct volcanoes.

I have no intention, however, of likening Justinian to anything terrible or disagreeable, or of depicting him as in any way repellent or repulsive. But the austerity and self-denial of his material life were extraordinary. Being gifted with an iron constitution, he generally pursued his studies late into the night, and nevertheless rose before daybreak. His favourite drink was water, his food of the simplest description—chiefly bread and vegetables—and of these he allowed himself only sufficient to sustain health and strength. Not unfrequently he fasted altogether, passing many hours without nourishment. It is perhaps needless to say that for such a man the lip of woman was an untasted luxury.

Although this mode of life appeared ridiculous and absolutely offensive to most of his profligate contemporaries, and even the more soberly inclined shook their heads in disapproval of such extreme views, he was not on the whole unpopular. There was a grave courtesy and dignity in his manner and address which it was difficult not to admire, and which sat becomingly on one who was universally recognized as likely, from his great talents and powerful connections, to play an important part in future politics. His voice was melodious, and on every subject he could speak with graceful fluency ; he had, besides, the gift—for a gift it is—of being a patient and attentive listener. Men who seldom listen are invariably shallow.

His personal appearance was striking, although he was scarcely a handsome man. There was nothing of the pale student about Justinian, unless we choose to refer to his vigils and industry the signs of premature baldness which began to show themselves above the forehead. The stout Dacian strain, which the amphitheatres of old Rome knew well, held its own bravely against excessive consumption of the midnight oil. He was broad-chested and large limbed. The face, with an unusually florid complexion, was full of character ; the mask round, but the chin, though small, projected acutely. The brow was wide and massive ; the nose large and aquiline, with open nostrils ; the

eyes round, bright, and prominent. The least agreeable feature was the mouth, being sharp-drawn and unsympathetic. I have sketched his portrait with some minuteness, for comparison with that of the young Tyrian, Ecebolus, given a few chapters back. The reasons for such comparison will appear in due time.

If Justinian's material wants were few and easily satisfied, his intellectual cravings were immoderate. Every branch of learning, useful, elegant, and scientific, he in turn attacked and mastered. Tribonian, the most promising young counsel of the day, was wont to affirm that Justinian knew more about law than all the professors of Berytus put together. Marinus, the mathematician, consulted him on abstruse problems; on a knotty point of theology his opinion was not unacceptable to the Patriarch himself. Juliana Patricia submitted to his criticism the plan of her new schools, and Cosmas, the celebrated traveller, later known as Indicopleustes, or the Indian navigator, his schemes of ethnology and geography. Even Demas the charioteer and trainer, who seldom had much belief in the judgment of his noble patrons, listened respectfully to his somewhat pedantic disquisitions on the respective merits of the Palmatian, Mazacian, Cilician, Thessalian, Nisæan, and other breeds of horses. And yet the possessor of this vast conglomeration of knowledge

was as yet the most unpractical of men. He avoided the law-courts, and never disputed in the schools ; he declined public interference in politics or religion ; to bricks and mortar he had never committed himself ; had not in his life travelled further than Ravenna, and that on compulsion ; had never owned or backed a horse, and seldom entered the Hippodrome.

In the bosom of his family he was already a great man ; and, indeed, his carefully digested theories, his fund of precedent, and his accurate estimate of character, were invaluable to his gallant but illiterate uncle. Abroad he was little more than a noticeable cypher.

Such was the man whom his aunt Lupicina, the wife of Justin, found still poring over his books when she entered his chamber, long after the sun had risen and all the city was astir.

Justin, the Prefect or Commander of the household troops, who began life as a simple Dacian peasant, and had never learnt either to read or write—being one of the many instances of self-made men which the sixth century afforded—had with great discretion selected this excellent lady, Lupicina, from among the fair barbarians of his native province. In her declining years she was regarded by the gay world of Constantinople with inexpressible awe, and the sight of her tall, gaunt figure and severe countenance was enough to freeze

a whole band of Thyrsigeræ into propriety. Herself a rigid disciplinarian, and still retaining her primitive Dacian ignorance, she beheld in her ascetic and versatile nephew the embodiment of all that was good and great, and in her devotion to him yielded not even to his own mother. The latter, who rejoiced in the euphonious name of Bigleniza,—charitably softened by the Byzantines into Vigilantia—was also a worthy barbarian, excessively religious, or rather superstitious, but of a less marked and energetic character than her sister-in-law. She was content to idolize her son at a distance, never venturing upon advice or interference; and consequently the duties and confidences of maternal supervision were undertaken and excellently discharged by Lupicina. Many a happy hour did the two women pass in expatiating to each other on the infinite merit of their paragon; contrasting him with his peers and associates, much to the disadvantage of the latter, and whispering to each other predictions of the time when all the East should be of the same mind, and hail him as its lord and master.

When, therefore, Lupicina entered, and her nephew came forward to greet her with affectionate respect, she regarded him with a concentrated watchfulness, such as Ladon, the hundred-eyed dragon of the Hesperides, might have brought to bear upon the golden treasure he was deputed to guard.

But the expression of vigilant pride gave way to one more tender as she remarked the evident lassitude with which Justinian rose from his seat.

“Ah, my son!” she said, using the fond appellative by which she always addressed him (she was childless herself), “I fear you are taxing your energies too much. Reflect how valuable your life is, not only to us, but to the whole world; and beware, lest you undermine your strength before the hour comes when you will have greatest need of it. You should allow yourself more repose; you are tired, and your hand is feverish.”

“Dear lady,” replied Justinian, smiling, “believe me, there is no cause for alarm. My weariness is but transient, a trifling cramp. I am well used to it, and after the bath I shall be as fresh and vigorous as ever. It has pleased Providence to bestow upon me the gift of requiring less sleep than other men, and it were sinful to waste the additional life I thus gain. If, as you assure me, I am destined for future authority, how shall I rightly govern those whom God may commit to my charge, if my knowledge be not greater than theirs?”

“A noble sentiment, my son, and the blessing of Heaven will attend it. But you have yet ample time for preparation. Anastasius, though old and feeble, still lingers on; and if ever, as you deserve, you fill the throne of the Cæsars”—here Lupicina

involuntarily lowered her voice in deference to the majestic treason of her words—"it can only be as successor to your uncle. In spite of wounds and hard service he is still a strong man, and may be spared for years."

"I pray that he may be," answered Justinian, earnestly; "and even my prayer is selfish. Is he not my bulwark and protector? To him I owe fortune, education, prospects, everything. If I shine, it is through him alone; without him I should be nothing. My poor acquirements may happily enable me to be of some use to my uncle; but what are they beside the indomitable courage and energy which have raised him to be the equal of princes, and the right hand of kings?"

"Not all your acquirements, wonderful as they are," said Lupicina, intensely gratified, "are worth these golden words. It is in the name of your uncle that I now speak to you. He is of opinion that it would be wise to relax for a while the severity of your studies, and take a part in the recreation suitable—from a worldly point of view—to your age and station. It is desirable that you should be seen more frequently by the populace at the festivals and public amusements. I know that you despise these things, that their grossness and unprofitableness is offensive to your high-toned nature, but must we not, imperfect as we are, at times sacrifice our better feelings to expediency?

The Count Hypatius, I am told, loses no opportunity of courting popularity."

A peculiar smile hovered on the thin lips of Justinian. "Dearest lady," he said, "I pray you not to imagine that I despise the public amusements, as such. Pagan, brutal, and licentious as they often are, no one can be more aware than myself of their great political value in conciliating the masses. It is a sad but indisputable truth. But to regard them as personal recreations is a different matter. Granting their claim to be so considered, the simple fact remains that, with God's blessing, I am able to do without such frivolous distraction; whereas others—the Count Hypatius, for instance—are not, any more than they can dispense with extravagant costume, luxurious feasts, strong wines, and other things which I need not mention. Myself, I see no reason for any radical change in my habits for the present; nevertheless, in deference to my uncle's wishes, I am willing to be present at the Venations which take place to-day in the Cynegium. It is indeed a long time since I last attended them."

"I was about to propose as much," said Lupicina, "but, as usual, your wisdom has anticipated me. Your uncle will be much gratified at your ready submission to his desire. And now, I am charged by him with another message. He would have come to see you himself, but his duties

to-day call him elsewhere. Yesterday the Prefect of the Sacred Bedchamber sought a private interview with him."

"Amantius! With what purpose?"

"With what purpose, indeed! It would puzzle even your sagacity to guess. In the first place, he made your uncle a present, with Cæsar's sanction—a magnificent one."

"Why with Cæsar's sanction?"

"Because the present is nothing less than four splendid Palmatians."

"Four horses of the Imperial breed? That is indeed magnificent!—an honour which has been accorded to few subjects. But are they actually the gift of his lordship or Cæsar?"

"His Illustriousness represented that he suggested to Cæsar some slight acknowledgment of your uncle's services and devotion during the late riots, and hinted at this gift of the Palmatians."

"I see," said Justinian, smiling; "one word for Cæsar and two for himself."

"His Majesty appears at first to have hesitated, but eventually made the horses over to the Lord Chamberlain, with the understanding that he might bestow them as he thought fit."

"Unhappy Cæsar!" murmured Justinian. "Is there anything he could refuse to that sleek, double-faced counsellor? I have heard that Count Hypatius himself has often tried in vain

to obtain such a gift from his Imperial uncle. I wonder that the Chamberlain did not present the horses to his Highness; he must be enormously wealthy by this time. He has but to ask."

"You will say so, indeed, when you have heard all. The important part is still to come."

"I suspected that the gift was only preliminary."

"After some circumlocution, he concluded by offering to place in your uncle's hands, in prospect of Cæsar's death, which he believes cannot be far distant, an immense donative for distribution among the Palatines."

"A bribe to the guards! This is truly important. And did the Chamberlain reveal for whom he desired to secure their good will? Not for himself; that is impossible."

"Prepare to be astounded. For none other than that abject, contemptible creature of his, Theocritus, whom he dares to mention in connection with the purple. It is difficult to conceive such a piece of audacity."

"It is difficult to conceive such a piece of rash confidence. Has the Lord Chamberlain no suspicion that if my uncle were to solicit the favour of his own corps, it would probably be in his own behalf?"

"Apparently he has none."

"Quem Deus vult perdere prius dementat,"

said Justinian, grimly. "And what was the general's reply?"

"He answered in his usual blunt fashion. That he was a plain soldier, and that kind of proposition being new to him, he must have time to consider."

"Plain soldier or not, it was the most judicious answer he could have made. My uncle will no doubt take an early opportunity of discussing this subject with me. In the mean time I will consider it carefully. Is there any other detail of importance?"

"None that I can remember," said Lupicina.

"Then, dear lady, with your permission, I will prepare to attend the Venations."

"Not even your mother knows of this offer," said Lupicina, significantly, as she retired.

"I understand," replied her nephew. "I have been told," he continued to himself when he was left alone, "that women can never keep a secret. I think that he would be a very clever man who could wheedle one out of my excellent aunt. What is to be the decision about this donative?—refusal or acceptance? How does the matter stand? To refuse is to make an enemy of an official who, however contemptible he may be in some respects, is shrewd and unscrupulous, and has the ear of Cæsar. To accept is to engage to place the diadem some day on the head of a worthless parasite, with no recommendation but good looks and a ready

tongue. Amantius, no doubt, designs to reign himself through this Theocritus. How far does the danger of the Chamberlain's enmity place us under constraint, and render such an obligation void? The situation is delicate, and requires prayerful meditation. It is one of those perilous dilemmas which the arch-intriguer delights in creating for our temptation, where policy and principle seem to be hopelessly antagonistic. May the holy saints inspire us to solve the problem without sin! And now for a bath, some breakfast, and these troublesome Venations. Without there! let the aliptes attend me."

Somewhat later Justinian, soberly but richly dressed, and attended by a suitable retinue, made an item in the vast crowd which was flocking merrily into the Cynegium or amphitheatre, where the Venations were to be held. This, it must be understood, was a different building to the Circus or Hippodrome, where the chariot races took place, and the site of which is now marked by the Turkish Atmeidan.

If any suppose that they are about to be regaled with a description of these sports or "hunts," as they were called, I fear they will be disappointed, for it is not my intention to say a word about them, conceiving that a far greater interest attaches to the doings of the human wild beasts who were there assembled than to those of

the poor brutes who were compelled to rend and worry each other, or were tamely slaughtered, for the public amusement. I say tamely, because after the final suppression of gladiators, and in the degenerate days of the Eastern Empire, human life was rarely endangered in the public sports. Even when men were introduced into the arena, care was taken, by the use of narcotics and other means, that the animals should be victimized at the least possible risk.

Any one who has witnessed, under the purple sky of Seville or Madrid, a modern Spanish crowd bearing down from every quarter upon the Plaza in a state of half-ferocious delight and eagerness at the prospect of the bull-fight, can form a fair idea of the appearance of Constantinople on such a festive occasion as I am attempting to describe. The light, warmth, and colour are the same. But not in her palmiest days could Spain produce ought to rival the magnificent picturesqueness of a Byzantine gala. Let us endeavour to imagine ourselves assisting at it, in the interests, say, of the Athenian Academy, or the Portico of Antioch.

Listen to the blare of the silver trumpets, and mark where through the sea of bending heads the Imperial cortége is slowly advancing. For to-day Anastasius Cæsar will occupy the throne of the Cynegium. The streets along the route are thickly strewn with gold-dust, the buildings are hung with

costly draperies, the pressure of the crowd is restrained by cords of purple, and ranged in a long vista of martial statues the Dalmatians keep the line of the procession.

Foremost rides Justin, the Prefect of the Imperial Guard, at the head of his tall Armenians. Their tunics are snow white; their helmets and breastplates, of polished silver, flash in the sunlight with intolerable brilliancy. Surely the angelic warriors who guard the celestial portals are not more glorious than these! Then follows a train of glittering officials, conspicuous among them the purple robes and gemmed insignia of the consuls for the year: their empty dignity now confers no greater privilege than to assist at such a pageant as this. Shades of Fabricius and Scipio, how are your successors fallen! Behind them again, moving as one man, sweep past the golden-helmeted ranks of the chosen Protectors, the body-guard of Cæsar; and in the midst of the level spear-points we discern the playing of the jewelled fans, which cool and perfume the air around the Sacred Head. At last it comes, drawn by snowy steeds of the Palmatian breed, the great car of gold and ivory and precious stones, in which is seated a feeble old man, whose withered and pallid face consorts but ill with the splendour of his tiara and purple mantle ablaze with gems, but who, despite his eighty years and shattered health, still bears

himself bravely, with the emotionless apathy that becomes a despotic lord of the East. In the rear of the Imperial chariot pass the equipages of the Princes, Patricians, and great officers of state, vying with each other in the magnificence of their appointments and the number of their attendants, until the eye is weary of the interminable pomp, and we feel relieved when it is closed by the squadron of fierce-eyed, long-haired Heruli, who, to the great satisfaction of the rabble which tramps behind, clash their arms in marching to the rhythm of a barbaric chant bequeathed to them by their Scandinavian ancestors.

Amid the surge-like roar of the swaying multitude, the glowing cavalcade rolls on to the Cynegium, where the picked bands of the Factions, with their ensigns and musicians, are marshalled to receive it; and here the human ocean is swollen by many a tributary stream, as the long retinues of the lords and ladies who play no part in the official programme come pouring in. We may wait just long enough near the private entrance to see the aged Emperor deposited on the dragon-embroidered carpet which, like a cascade of purple and gold, comes sweeping down the covered staircase leading to the throne, and then we will turn away and follow the steps of Justinian.

CHAPTER XI.

THE SUPPLIANTS.

THERE were four main entrances to the broad corridor which ran completely round the Cynegium, the first appropriated to the use of the nobility and upper classes, the second to the organized adherents of the Factions, the third to the general public, and the fourth to such of the fair Patricians as chose to honour the sanguinary sports with their presence. The corridor in its turn gave access by numerous archways and flights of steps to the different parts of the building. Over these inner doors were numbers, corresponding to the blocks of seats to which they led. By this means all confusion was avoided, and the great stream of spectators flowed rapidly in until the place was full. Within, and facing each of the main entrances, where the crush was likely to be greatest, was a spacious hall or lobby, adorned with appropriate statues, and permitting through a latticed aperture a partial view of the interior.

On occasions like this it was customary with the young bloods of Constantinople (especially when they aimed at popularity) to identify themselves with the Factions whose colours they affected. Accordingly Justinian—who in compliance with his uncle's wishes had transformed himself for the nonce into a young blood—and his attendants, were decorated with badges of bright blue, and directed their steps to the Faction gate. Justinian had scarcely entered the outer corridor when he became aware that the throng was not moving forward with its customary smoothness—there was a hitch somewhere; at the same time his ears were greeted by the sound of clamorous voices and bursts of boisterous laughter.

Not, however, feeling much interest as to the cause of this uproar, he passed on and managed to advance some way up the staircase; but here his further progress was impeded by a dense phalanx of people, who, having more curiosity than himself, had simply ascended for the purpose of obtaining a better view. Like a prudent man he abandoned the unequal contest, and getting close to the balustrade looked over into the lobby.

This is what he saw. Against the end wall and within the slight recess of the terminal arch were stationed three girls, of whom the eldest appeared to be about sixteen, the youngest not more than ten years of age. They were dressed in long white

garments ; on their heads were chaplets of white flowers, and they carried similar wreaths in their hands. In front of them was placed a small tripod on which stood a metal dish containing a few coins, and to the wall above their heads was affixed a placard with this inscription in enormous letters :—

“ These are the orphan daughters of Acacius, late Master of the bears ! Ye Greens ! show pity on the children of your faithful and much-wronged servant ! Ye Blues ! have compassion on the destitute ! ”

Not far off hovered an elderly and decent-looking woman, evidently in a state of much anxiety and agitation.

Although the majority of those who entered contented themselves with casting a passing look of pity or curiosity on the hapless trio, and, directing their attendants to “ give the poor things something,” hurried on to secure their seats before the commencement of the sports, the sight was sufficiently novel and remarkable to detain a large number, and notably those who, from their jealous devotion to their favourite colour and the pains they took to exhibit the same on every possible occasion, might be classed as the professional rowdies of the Factions.

Whether the consciences of such of these gentlemen as supported the cause of the Greens were

unpleasantly pricked or their dignity insulted by the injudicious allusion to the wrongs of Acacius, or whether, as Lysias had foretold, and was most probable, they were but too glad of an excuse for a collision with their Blue rivals, it is certain that the appeal was most detrimental to the end it had in view.

Here and there, indeed, a charitable murmur was heard from some more tender-hearted partisan, and several were seen to bestow a liberal proof of their sympathy; but the demonstration of these weaklings received a speedy check.

“Men of the Green Faction!” bellowed a tall bravo, and the arches rang to his stentorian tones, “will ye publicly confess yourselves in fault? Treat this traitor’s brood with the contempt which it merits, and if the Blues try to shame you into generosity, teach them to draw forth something else besides their purses.”

This brutal and pugnacious speech was received with cheers by the majority of his comrades, and the fiercer spirits among the rival Faction unhesitatingly took up the challenge.

“Traitor’s brood!” cried a bold young fellow, drawing a dagger from beneath his tunic and holding up a gold piece in his other hand. “A fine excuse, forsooth, for adding stinginess to injustice! Men of the Blues! show these misers the way to be liberal! For myself, were this the last coin

I possessed in the world, it should go to these poor girls, for the sake of the words we have just heard; and for him who uttered them I have this." And he brandished his dagger as the coin rang into the metal.

Those of the Blues who were nearest were not slow in following his example. The Greens pressed forward with savage exclamations. Weapons, forbidden by law and hitherto concealed, were displayed on both sides, and a bloody fray seemed imminent.

Fortunately, the tumult had drawn together a few of the police whose special duty was to maintain order in the amphitheatre, and who, like our own constables, were armed with staves, and these men, at their own peril, managed for the moment to prevent a breach of the peace. As luck would have it, at this crisis shouts were heard of "Room, room! gentlemen of the Factions, room for the Count Hypatius! place for the Illustrious Patrician!" and the Emperor's nephew, surrounded by a glittering staff of friends and parasites, appeared upon the scene.

Hypatius, as we have already learnt, was, if left to himself, a man of generous impulses, and albeit somewhat tainted with the luxury and licentiousness of the times, by no means vicious or ill-disposed at heart. But although he was of mature age, being older than Justinian, had served with

sufficient credit in the Persian wars, and enjoyed for a year the much-coveted but empty honours of the Consulship, he had never succeeded in learning the art of self-command, or of resisting the voice of flattery and the force of bad example. Perhaps, from a consciousness of his own fallibility, he was habitually prudent, but a temptation which assailed him in an unguarded moment was sure to be victorious.

The morning of the Venations found the Patrician in a particularly self-satisfied and genial frame of mind. In the first place he had been permitted a glimpse of his youthful lady-love, the fair Maria, to whom he was greatly attached. Secondly, he had been allowed, as a great favour and not without political reasons, to depute to his subaltern, his brother Pompey, the duties which attached him to the person of his Imperial uncle, and was thus enabled to visit the sports in the company of a select band of choice spirits whom he had previously entertained at a sumptuous repast. Then he felt himself to be good-looking and a favourite, even with the Blue Faction, while by his own party, the Greens, his presence was certain to be hailed with enthusiasm. Altogether he was in that pleasant state of mental exaltation and supreme egotism when a man is more likely to say and do foolish things than any other time.

The appearance of the Count produced an imme-

diate lull in the tumult. The antagonists drew back; the ringleaders might be seen endeavouring to put out of sight the forbidden weapons, and to compose their angry countenances to the requisite look of innocence.

“What is all this, gentlemen?” inquired Hypatius, trying to look stern; “it appears to me a novel kind of Venations. And who are these,” he added, as his eye fell upon Theodora and her sisters, “who look like young martyrs?”

“By the head of Cæsar, your Highness is right!” exclaimed a gorgeous young gentleman at his elbow, catching at the idea and improving upon it. “They are for all the world like the figures on the Lady Juliana’s last Sunday mantle. Cannot you, my lord, fancy yourself transported to old Rome, and hear the shout of the mob—‘Christianos ad Leones?’”

“Ay,” replied Hypatius, who was attentively studying Theodora. “How marvellously beautiful that girl is! The latter half of the shout would be more to the purpose, I think, and has the merit of not being quite out of date—‘Virgines ad Lenones!’”

“By the eyes of Venus, you are right again, my lord!” cried the elegant sycophant. “She is exquisite! Gentlemen,” he continued, addressing the bystanders, “you may spare yourselves further discussion. The oracle has spoken, the decision has

gone forth. Applaud the sentiment of the Illustrious Count—‘*Virgines ad Lenones!*’”

The cruel jest struck the fickle fancy of the mob. The traditional Latin cry, of which not a man there, whatever his nationality, but understood the import, was echoed from mouth to mouth, until the strong masonry quivered to the horrid shout, and the great beasts in the dens beneath responded with a muffled roar, as if they too caught the meaning of the hideous syllables, and hoped that where the claim of lust was recognized that for blood might not be unheard.

Hypatius, to do him justice, crimsoned with shame and indignation at the effect of his thoughtless speech, and glared daggers at the aristocratic ruffian beside him. But it was too late; a chord had been struck which vibrated through the sinful hearts of Blues and Greens alike, and the torrent of prurient insult broke forth at once.

“How savage the beauty looks!” cried one scoundrel; “it would take a bold man to tackle her. Why not make her Ursaria? I’ll be sworn she would keep the beasts in as good order as ever did her father.”

“She has his own look, to be sure,” said another. “Well, for my part, I like them timid and tender. Hand me over blue eyes there, and I’ll escort her home. We won’t trouble to stay for the sports, thank you.”

A roar of brutal laughter followed this speech.

“Fair division!” shouted the tall blackguard who had first spoken, thrusting himself forward. “It’s a thousand pities we can’t send them to the Catasta; they would fetch a price there that would supply us gentlemen with good wine for many a day. Perhaps the Illustrious Count might like to buy one for himself.”

“As a present for his fair lady that is to be,” added a third.

“Young, sound, and free from blemish,” went on the other, emboldened by the silence of Hypatius, who, in a transport of rage, was utterly at a loss how to speak or act with decision. “An inspection allowed, and a warranty given! Shall I act as showman?” And the monster audaciously stretched out his hand and tore open the front of Theodora’s robe.

Then, indeed, Hypatius recovered himself, but his wrath was anticipated. There was a terrible imprecation. A figure all green and gold sprang forward, and in another second the ruffian crashed down upon the marble pavement, his face running with blood from the wounds inflicted by the delicate jewelled fingers of Ecebolus the Tyrian.

All this time Justinian, wedged in the crowd above, was looking on with mingled feelings. Prompt courage was not one of his special virtues, and at the first signs of conflict and the sight of

the naked steel some apprehensions for his personal safety were uppermost. To these succeeded a glow of fierce indignation, and had he been able to extricate himself he would probably have made in to the assistance of the orphans as fearlessly as Eceboli. But throughout the whole scene astonishment and admiration at the bearing of Theodora superseded all other emotions.

Whilst Comito screamed, and poor little Anastasia cowered down sobbing, their sister stood erect, white, and unflinching as the marble effigy of the divine huntress which filled the adjoining niche. The slight furrow beneath her eyebrows deepened to an angry frown, and over her fair face swept that strange resemblance to her father which Hermia had noticed on a previous occasion. During the burst of insult which followed the unfortunate words of Hypatius, she fixed her great fearless eyes upon him with a look of concentrated rage, scorn, and loathing that was terrible to behold. It haunted the Patrician for many a long day, and when years after he again encountered that glance, he knew at once that his moments on earth were numbered.

It is a well-worn saying that the qualities in which we are most deficient ourselves are those which attract us most in others. It may have been some half-consciousness of his own irresolution in moments of danger which rendered the bearing of

Theodore looked with admiration in the eyes of Justinian. At the same time he found himself under the influence of other emotions besides surprise and admiration—emotions novel and startling. He had never seen any one so exquisitely beautiful, either in face or figure. Her wondrous loveliness, which circumstances forced him to contemplate for a length of time, thawed the superficial callousness of his nature as the sun melts snow. A transient spring of tenderness breathed over his frost-bound heart. It broke upon his quickening senses, like a dash of light, what an untasted well of delight, what a hidden treasure of sweet companionship, there might be in woman. The theologian caught glimpses of a new worship, the student of all things of a new study. That pale, slender girl, in her simple white robe and withering chaplet, appealed to some latent longing in his soul which all the jewelled dames who, piqued by his indifference, were so prodigal of their charms and allurements, had failed to excite. A strong natural craving, hitherto held in bondage by a resolute will and stern discipline, wrestled within him for freedom. The volcano murmured, the lava stirred, the ice and granite trembled. If the heartquake was but transient, it weakened the upper crust of rigid asceticism, and gave promise of liberating at some future time the imprisoned passions.

"Are ye men, or devils from hell?" cried

Ecebolus, throwing a protecting arm round Theodora, and confronting unarmed the circle of flashing eyes and weapons. “Are there any brutes in the vaults beneath us more cruel and merciless than ye are? whom not even these desolate orphans can move to charity and compassion? Blues, hear me! I call on you to strike in their behalf, even though I myself pay the penalty of wearing this accursed livery.”

Not often has earth seen a better consorted pair than the two glorious young creatures who were there linked together; and in the midst of his righteous indignation against the brutal mob, an indefinable pang—was it akin to jealousy or envy?—shot through the breast of Justinian as he acknowledged to himself that to have behaved like Ecebolus, and to stand where he stood now, was worth all the risk and a lifetime of study.

The bold appeal of the Tyrian rekindled to a flame the smouldering animosity of the Factions, and now not the presence of all the patricians in the city, or of the Emperor himself, could have stayed their hands, had not the cause of order once more received a timely and powerful succour.

Hypatius had summoned presence of mind to exclaim, “A hundred solidi to any one who will bring the guard;” and at the offer a score of eager messengers broke from the outskirts of the crowd and dashed off in search of the military. But

Lysias, who had never lost sight of the sisters, and observed the awkward turn which events were taking, was beforehand with them. Even as the Tyrian was speaking, the sharp tones of command were heard in the corridor, and the mob split right and left before the steady tramp of a detachment of the Isaurians.

“Double up!—right about!—spears to the charge!” cried Eulalius, the officer in command, as, divining at a glance the state of affairs, he brought up his men to the end of the hall; and at the word an even line of glistening blades dropped between the victims and the persecutors. The latter at once fell back. The Isaurian highlanders, the bravest corps in the army of the East, were not to be trifled with.

“Clear out now, if you don’t want me to make short work with you,” cried the officer; “we are not going to have any rioting here. Lay hold of that fellow,” pointing to the ruffian whom Ecebolus had knocked down, and who had staggered to his feet again. “We’ll make an example of him.”

It was not seldom that the Factions when in full force resisted even the military with success, and on a subsequent occasion these very troops were scattered before their combined attack; but now the charms of the Venations appeared to present themselves to their minds with marvellous rapidity, and with many growls and oaths, Blues and Greens

alike slipped away to their respective staircases, leaving the field in the possession of the executive.

“We were only just in time, my lord,” said Eulalius, saluting Hypatius. “In another minute there would have been a pretty scuffle.”

“I thank you for your opportune arrival, sir,” said the Count, “and I also beg to thank this gentleman”—bowing to Ecebolus—“for his gallant conduct, and to express my sincere regret that it should have been forced upon him, owing to a foolish speech of mine, intended merely as a jest, but to which the officiousness of others gave undue prominence.”

At which the elegant parasite slunk into the background much crestfallen, and remained there ever after.

“What is to be done with these poor girls?” asked Ecebolus.

“They cannot be allowed to remain here,” said Eulalius; “we shall have a fresh riot when the games are over. It will be better to give them in charge of the police.”

And now the sub-Curator of the Cynegium, followed by his attendants, came puffing and blowing to the spot. For certain reasons, best known to himself and John of Cappadocia, this magistrate had connived at the very irregular exhibition of the orphans, and was in a great state of alarm at the consequences.

“ Now, sir, this is your business,” said Eulalius, contemptuously, to the frightened official. “ I suppose you are equal to preventing further disturbance. By your leave I will say good morning;” and saluting the company, he marched his men out of the building.

“ Does anybody own them ? ” inquired Hypatius.

Then came the turn of Lysias, who, stepping forward, humbly represented that the girls were the step-children of his wife, and that in accordance with the dying wishes of their father they had ventured to appeal to the clemency of the Factions.

The scheme of Chrysomalla had been unexpectedly aided by the Cappadocian. It could scarcely be demanded of John that he should personally superintend the exposure of the young suppliants in the Cynegium, and he said so plainly. He had supplied the necessary funds for the few contingent expenses, and privately arranged the matter with the Curator at the expense of a considerable fee. Then he informed Hermia and Theodora of his intention to keep in the background altogether. “ Public interference on my part,” he argued, “ would be absurd and incongruous ; it would give rise to various suspicions, and totally destroy the genuine character of the appeal. I shall not be far off, but more I cannot promise.” Theodora was quite contented. “ We do not expect more of you,” she

said ; "you have done a great deal for us, and you enable us to fulfil our father's last wishes. We thank you most heartily. And now leave us to Hermia ; she will take care of us." Young and inexperienced as she was, the girl could detect the Cappadocian's falseness under his mask of blunt sincerity better, probably, than most of her elders. The intuition of youth on such points is very keen. She had disliked him from the first, and although she tried to feel grateful for his past kindness, the effort was but indifferently successful. "Depend upon it, my lambs," said honest Hermia, "I won't lose sight of you, whatever happens." And Theodora felt that she, at least, was to be trusted. Consequently when Lysias came forward he had it all his own way.

The Cappadocian was looking on from the staircase above, ready enough to interfere if it seemed at all worth his while. On first entering the Cynegium he had stationed himself by the balustrade, close to Justinian, and his experiences had been nearly identical with those of his neighbour. Like him he had been horrified and indignant at the conduct of the Faction rowdies, and his cold heart smote him for having fulfilled his rash oath to Acacius ; like him he had been inextricably wedged in the crowd when he would have gladly gone to the rescue (John's courage was his only virtue) and like him he had been astounded

by the bearing of Theodora. But now he remained aloof and watched.

Hypatius sternly regarded Lysias as he made his little prepared speech. The Patrician was glad of an opportunity to assume a more dignified attitude.

“The exposure of those girls in such a place,” he said, “was a most injudicious proceeding, and I am astonished that his Excellency the Curator should have permitted it. Still, as I am myself responsible to a certain extent for the distressing results, we will say no more about it. Come here, sir.”

Lysias approached with a reverential bow. Marcia’s husband was, after all, a fine specimen of his class, and in his gala clothes—he was a bit of a dandy among his fellows—presented a very creditable, not to say dashing, appearance.

“You had better remove these children at once,” said Hypatius. “This may, perhaps, atone for my heedless words, and render such ill-judged appeals needless for the future;” and he placed a heavy purse in the hands of Lysias. “Gentlemen,” he continued, “Cæsar must be on the throne and the sports about to commence; be good enough to follow me.”

But Ecebolus still lingered, engaged in the not unpleasant task of calming the excitement of Theodora and the fears of her sisters, a task for

which he was eminently qualified. It was not long before even little Anastasia, smiling through her tears, was clinging fearlessly to his rich attire and looking up in wonder at his handsome face.

But Theodora was not to be so easily pacified. She was bitterly angry and disappointed. All her hopes were ruthlessly crushed, and how strong those hopes had been she had never revealed even to Hermia. "I will not go with that man," she said stubbornly; "he will take us to our step-mother, who hates us and will ill-treat us. Oh, sir! you who are so brave and so beautiful, you will not be hard-hearted like the rest! Save us! Do not let them send us back into misery!"

"My dear child," said the Tyrian, in his rich, musical accents, "what can I do for you? You must see that your remaining here is out of the question. Some one must take charge of you. I cannot believe that anybody could find it in their heart to ill-treat one so lovely as yourself."

"Let me respectfully assure your Magnificence," interposed Lysias, who was much impressed by the splendid appearance of Ecebolus, "that there is no danger of such a thing. I allow that there have been unfortunate domestic quarrels, but I will swear that they shall not occur again. The girls shall be treated with all kindness."

"He lies! he lies!" broke in Hermia, who during this dialogue had ventured to creep nearer.

“ You do not know what a fiend their stepmother is ! She was this man’s—— ”

“ My God ! ” exclaimed the sub-Curator, “ this is maddening ! Here is another who wants to meddle in the affair. Hold your tongue, miserable woman. Here, some of you ! take this person away ; put her outside. I beg your pardon, sir,” he added to Ecebolus, who looked inclined to interfere ; “ my duty compels me to be peremptory. If any inquiry is needful, this is not the place for it. Let the parties appear in due form before the Quæstor. I am sure you will uphold my authority.”

“ By all means,” answered the Tyrian. “ I agree with your Excellency that such a dispute is out of place here. My child, you hear what this man, your stepfather, says. He assures me he will protect you. I will not lose sight of you, and, if necessary, your case shall come before the Quæstor. In the mean time you will not be welcomed at home less agreeably for bringing this with you ; ” and taking from his own neck a gold chain, he hung it round Theodora’s, at the same time pressing his lips to her fair forehead.

Whilst he did this the girl never stirred ; so irresistibly fascinating were his tone and look that her passion died away, and the familiarity which in another would have been intolerable seemed from him natural and even sweet.

“ I will go with him, then, if you wish it,” she

said, in a subdued voice. "I cannot thank you as I should like for all you have done for us—not here. And we may never see you again."

"Oh, we shall meet again some day, pretty one, depend upon it," said the Tyrian, lightly. "I have my thanks now in this gentleness, and in your eyes, which tell me more than you imagine. Farewell; be sure I will not forget you."

Among those who remained on the steps above, to witness the termination of this scene, were Justinian and John of Cappadocia. At one moment the former had been tempted to descend, but some novel and inexplicable sensation deterred him. Considering who and what he was, it could scarcely be termed jealousy, and yet it was in some degree allied to that morbid feeling which in many a modern salon makes one man grimly survey from a distance the triumph of another, to whom, despite certain trivial and superficial attributes which he cannot deny, he considers himself on the whole immeasurably superior. Perhaps some unconscious consciousness whispered to him that the very name of the Tyrian would one day be as poison to him, and he already began to dislike whilst he could not help admiring him.

The Cappadocian, taking notes of all that had occurred, found the sum of them to agree with his anticipations. "It is just as I expected," he soliloquized; "the appeal has been a failure. That big

ruffian and that devilish woman have made a good thing of it, and no one else. I am a considerable loser. Good nature does not pay. The girls are well off my hands, and yet I am more sorry on their account than I could have believed possible. What is to become of that extraordinary Theodora? Again I say, what is her destiny? I must keep a sharp eye on Ecebolus. Come, no more dreaming. I have practical matters enough on my hands at present. What a venture it is! To-morrow will mar or make me with a vengeance."

CHAPTER XII.

THE END OF THE FIRST ACT.

THE sequel of the preceding chapter is not difficult to imagine as far as it concerns the daughters of Acacius.

Lysias, overjoyed at the handsome sum which the orphans had already brought him, took care to impress upon his amiable spouse after his own fashion the necessity of paying proper attention to the goose with the golden eggs. The treatment and diet of that invaluable bird were to be of the best. Therefore the inquiries which Ecebolus did not forget to make resulted in the Tyrian's being satisfied that the temper and disappointment of Theodora had tempted her to exaggerate the discomfort of her home, and the interference of poor Hermia he set down to the spitefulness of a neighbour. He also learnt that the girls, or at least the two elder, were destined for the stage, which he thought, under the circumstances, an admirable arrangement. After which he dismissed the subject

lightly ; and if we except some faint, sweet recollection of the fair brow on which he had pressed his lips, and a regretful sigh to the memory of those magnificent eyes, Apollo forgot all about the young suppliants, to protect whom he had for an instant descended from his lofty sphere. Ecebolus was too much the spoilt child of society to feel the want of any particular toy.

Justinian, ashamed of his momentary defection from the rigid principles of thought and action which he had prescribed for himself, endeavoured to steel his mind more than ever against the seduction of all vanities, especially feminine ones ; and although for him also the memory of the Venations was not quite obliterated, and in the midst of his studies the fair image of the young Cyprian, white-robed, dark-eyed, and chestnut-tressed, would sometimes steal across the page, for the moment he might be pronounced out of danger. For some time the cheek of Hypatius burned as he recalled his own mean part in the transaction, but he never alluded to the subject, and never asked his officious friend to breakfast again.

The faithful Hermia, after much deliberation with herself, made a great effort on behalf of her beloved lambs. The good woman found her way into the Quæstor's court, and there strove to obtain a hearing for a vehement and incoherent tale which nobody understood or was disposed to listen to ;

until the patience of the court being exhausted, she was gently expelled by the usher. And then she too gave up in despair, weeping bitterly.

Various versions of the affair were buzzed about in certain Byzantine circles, and Proclus the Prefect, incited thereto by Maria, who had conceived a sudden fancy of educating a handmaiden according to her own ideas, ferretted out Lysias and made on the part of his daughter an offer of taking little Anastasia into her own immaculate household, which was accepted.

Lastly, the persuasive art of Chrysomalla was brought to bear upon the remaining sisters. The not very strong-minded Comito was induced, without much difficulty, to dedicate her life to the amusement of the Byzantine public; but Theodora, suspicious of everybody and everything, resisted sullenly. The profession which, to poor Hermia's horror, she had playfully pronounced herself ready to adopt, now appeared utterly hateful when pressed upon her by those whom she scorned and detested. Then she was in high spirits and sanguine as to the result of the appeal to public sympathy, now she was downcast and smarting under a bitter sense of ill-treatment and injustice. And so she remained stubborn. So much so that Chrysomalla, of course against her will, was obliged to recommend her vile coadjutors to administer a dose of severity at home, which enabled her to sketch a

delicately contrasted picture of the perpetual roses of dramatic life. This gentle ruse not being altogether successful, as a last resource the aid of the caterer for public amusements was called in, and that enterprising official, primed by the old Tænaotic and backed by Chrysomalla, in a private interview represented to Theodora the peculiarities of her position, and suggested that a graceful submission to circumstances would be preferable to a compulsory obedience to the paternal authority of the law.

Alas ! for the fair piece of virgin gold, stamped with the divine image, which had fallen into the hands of these unscrupulous debasers ! Deserted, bullied, ill-treated, deprived of all friendly advice and assistance, what could the poor child do but consent ? Within a few hours afterwards the names of Theodora and Comito were formally enrolled upon the register of actresses, and the girls to all appearance irrevocably doomed to a life of infamy, and, by the teaching of the times, to an eternity of punishment !

Strong expressions are the last, especially for the ears of these latter days, when the stage can boast alliance with nobles and friendship with princes, and may indulge unrebuked in a reasonable hope that it is not at least excluded from the scheme of salvation ; but they are justifiable. The breasts of our not very remote forefathers nourished a considerable outgrowth of that bitter hostility against

play-houses and play-actors which was initiated by the early Church. That the hostility was well grounded we cannot dispute. In former days the theatre was the Church's most deadly enemy. In the heart of Christian populations it was the strong-hold of shamelessness, indelicacy, profanity, and heathenism; it fostered the vices and kept alive the traditions which the Church was labouring to eradicate and suppress. This was especially the case in the capitals of the East. The passion of the Byzantines for the drama was insatiable, and their taste abominable. Their ravenous appetite gulped down eagerly whatever garbage was presented to it; so long as the dish was well garnished and highly seasoned, the quality of the meat passed unchallenged. To overthrow this Dagon of the stage was more than the Church was able, perhaps cared, to accomplish. But it could deface and mutilate his members, and gibbet his worship for the scorn and loathing of the world. And it did so most effectually. It girded the temples of the impure idol with a cordon of fiery anathema; it banned his priests and ministers as outcasts and lepers. It called in the aid of rhetoric, letters, and the law. The most eloquent tongues of the day thundered from the pulpit their denunciations against the trade of the actor; the most subtle pens argued against its pernicious influence; the legal mind regarded it as a vile and voluntary

slavery. The public presence of an actor or actress anywhere but on their own stage was pronounced contaminating ; there was no place for them among the audience in the theatre, or even at the games. They dared not enter the body of a church, and were refused the eucharist. The not fastidious atmosphere of the public baths rejected their polluted persons. Their baptism was annulled, and they were regenerated to iniquity ; they became members of the devil, the children of perdition, and inheritors of the kingdom of hell. If in failing health or declining years they sought readmission to the Church, re-baptism was indispensable, and after that they could never return to their profession : more, by an almost malignant inconsistency, the sick actor was regarded with stern suspicion, lest his prayer for the holy rite might be merely a stratagem for escaping his unholy bondage. To marry an actress was disgraceful to the meanest citizen, to those of or above senatorial rank it was impossible ; the contract was void. The curse of the parents was extended to the offspring, and the daughter of an actress who died without re-baptism was compelled to follow the profession of her mother. To condemn the evil and to perpetuate it, to recognize its necessity and to render it as evil as possible, was apparently the object in view ; the condemnation was permissive, and the recognition blasting. This policy, as we

might expect, had the most fatal results. The stage, subjected to public quarantine, avenged itself, reptilewise, by secretly infecting the household ; it repaid the public scorn by corrupting the domestic mind. The worms turned upon their trampers ; the players defied the Church, and gloried in their unblessed martyrdom. They attracted the openly dissolute and the secretly prurient, and made their baseness a potent factor in society. The actresses paraded their shame, and profited thereby. One power they possessed, that of the snake—they could fascinate and destroy. The gilded youth of Constantinople fluttered down towards the fair basilisks, were caught, absorbed, and digested, and rejected upon society, the refuse of their former selves. Stringent laws became necessary to prevent rich wards and minors from consummating their sin and ruin by the irretrievable folly of marriage.

This is no exaggerated picture ; and if we dispassionately regard the tone and influence of the stage in some European countries at the present day, we shall find it scarcely less deleterious. The coarseness and indelicacy have indeed disappeared, to be replaced by seductive wit and elegant immorality. Naked truth is fashionably draped ; the drapery is scanty and transparent. To jest attractively over the infidelity of a wife is probably on the whole more hurtful to public morals than to

grossly portray the amours of a goddess. But the thunders of the Church are silent, the ban of excommunication is removed, and the old-world contempt for the actor's trade is succeeded by almost idolatrous admiration for the person of the player.

At an early hour on the second morning after the Venations all Constantinople was in a state of rabid excitement, for a rumour ran like wildfire through the city that the Patriarch Macedonius had disappeared. It turned out to be true, and the orthodox party at once attempted a fresh sedition. But, strange to relate, as though the authorities had foreseen the occurrence and its probable consequences, their immense military resources were found to have been so disposed during the night that the attempt was hopeless. Even the turbulence of the Factions was overawed.

Then appeared an official notice to the effect that, it having come to the ears of the Patriarch that certain fresh and grave charges (which were not specified) would be preferred against him, his guilty conscience had prompted him to avoid the divine wrath of Cæsar by flight.

For a time the city lay under martial law. Innumerable arrests were made, a certain number of people vanished altogether from society, and a few by various modes of punishment were held up as warning examples; until the orthodox party were

crushed and terrified into silence, and it became possible to gradually relax the military terrorism.

Amid all this the facts which most concern us are that the worth of John of Cappadocia was suddenly appreciated by the government, and he was appointed to a lucrative berth in the office of the Military Prefecture; and that Maria nearly cried her eyes out when Proclus, looking pale and stern, entered her room, and informed her, with unusual acrimony in his voice, that war was now inevitable, and that he was more than ever determined to oppose her marriage with Hypatius.

But although the thunderclouds began to gather, and the distant gleam of the lightning to play upon the horizon, the bursting of the storm was still delayed; and through the spring months men whose hearts were in the struggle, and whose very being depended upon its issue, watched and waited in a still atmosphere charged with the hot breath of the approaching tempest.

BOOK II.

CHAPTER I.

BELITZAR.

AND now it was summer time in the pleasant plains of Thrace, and also war time, the time of the first Religious War, which in its aspect in no way differed from other wars by reason of its euphonious title. None the less was the path of the destroyer attested by ruined villages and blazing homesteads, by disfigured corpses strewn among the trampled crops and vineyards, by the wail of women and cries of agony and despair. The old gods gathered in wan conclave on the now unhallowed summit of Olympus might mark with grim delight that the votaries of the religion which had condemned their rites and ousted them from their temples, the religion which proclaimed peace on earth and goodwill towards men, slaughtered and burned, pillaged and ravished, with as great zeal and gusto as ever did their own worshippers.

For Vitalian, Count of the Gothic Federates, had kept his word ; and with a mighty army and a

mighty fleet was marching and sailing upon Constantinople, to avenge the exile of the Patriarch Macedonius and his brother bishop, Flavian of Antioch, who had been ejected from his see to make room for the heretic Severus, and to demand reparation for the wrongs of the orthodox generally.

It is true that, if the cause of Vitalian was that of the Catholic faith, his army was chiefly composed of barbarians, the majority of whom, if they were Christians at all, as may well be doubted, certainly understood and cared as much about the nice shades of religious doctrine as they did about the use of gunpowder. Moreover, as subsequent history has proved to be invariably the case in religious warfare, all that there was of the most vile and worthless was attracted to his standard. Whatever the real motive, there was a pretext which the consent of ages has pronounced excellent. The right of being opinionative upon matters of faith and doctrine has been universally conceded to the most unprincipled of mankind. The designs of the Count himself, despite the undoubted sincerity of his pious wrath, were scarcely disinterested. He was a man of great influence and prestige. His forefathers, Princes of Scythia, had repeatedly commanded the armies of the Eastern Empire; his great grandfather, Aspar, as conscientiously heretical as his descendant was orthodox, had missed the purple only by refusing subscription to the

Nicene Creed; but his nomination of Leo, his steward, was actually accepted, and he was afterwards murdered by the emperor of his own creation. During the seditions at Constantinople, when the different parties testified their discontent at the existing state of things by clamouring each for a different ruler, the name of Vitalian was shouted by the mob as often as any other.

As Proclus the Prefect had predicted to his daughter Maria, Count Hypatius was summoned to the field directly the war broke out. At the head of a large force he was despatched to check the progress of Vitalian, who had advanced without opposition as far as Anchialus. When the armies were face to face a number of the Imperial troops went over to the enemy. Hypatius, without waiting for reinforcements, gave battle; he was defeated with great slaughter, and himself taken prisoner. The remnant of his army retreated with all expedition to the *Makron Teikos*, or Long Wall, which Anastasius had built to protect the outskirts of the capital. The command was then given to Cyril, who at first obtained some trivial advantages over the Gothic prince, but his forces also were weakened by continual desertion, and eventually allowing himself to be surprised at Odessus, he was captured, and immediately executed. After this double success Vitalian retired into winter quarters at Anchialus; and now for the third time his

columns swept down like a hurricane upon the devastated plains of Thrace.

The day was drawing serenely to a close, and the low sun nearly rested on the distant range of Mount Rhodope, when Belitzar, the son of Phocas the Thracian, having concealed his boat and nets in the tall reeds which fringed the lake whereon he had been toiling all day, shouldered his pannier of fish and turned his steps towards home.

That home was a small farmhouse nestling below one of the southern slopes of the Balkan, and which, from its sequestered position in the recess of a quiet glade surrounded by thick groves of timber trees, had hitherto escaped the keen eyes of the foragers and marauders who scoured the country in all directions; and now, as the tide of war passed on towards the capital, there seemed a prospect that this enviable security might continue.

Nevertheless the heart of the stalwart young peasant was ill at ease as he covered with powerful strides the distance between the lake and his father's house, and reflected on what might have occurred during his absence. That day, for the first time since the fresh occupation of the territory by Vitalian's forces, tempted by the quiet of the neighbourhood, he had ventured so far from home and remained away so long.

And yet, he thus argued with himself, what was there to fear? At the worst the loss of a few oxen

or sheep, the consumption of a few jars of wine, or of the immediate supply of provisions; and at this idea he smiled, for Belitzar, though but a boy in years, was a man, and no ordinary man, in strength and stature, and a mighty hunter to boot, and with the spoils of the chase he would soon supply the deficiency.

The house contained but few articles of intrinsic value; there was not a woman about the place who was young or good-looking enough to be a temptation to a not over-fastidious Hun; and his father had engaged that in the event of a visit from the barbarians there should be no vain attempt at resistance on his own part or that of the farm servants. On that score, indeed, there was not much to fear from the latter, for the very mention of Vitalian's wild riders was enough to blanch their cheeks, and the distant gleam of a lance or the faint peal of a trumpet to send them scampering to the forest like frightened deer. But the fiery temper of the old man, apt to blaze out upon slight provocation, was a constant source of apprehension to his son.

Not five years before, the Scythian free lances had looked in at the farm, and if they were rough and boisterous over their wine, they perpetrated no outrage greater than forcing Gabat the herdsman to drink on his knees three full beakers to the health of some outlandish god; by which the said Gabat

was rendered incapable of performing his duties for twenty-four hours afterwards. And had not their leader on their departure dashed on the table a chain of sufficient value to buy a whole cellar of wine, and secure the services of Gabat for the remainder of his existence? Certainly on that occasion the barbarians were in the most amiable mood and could afford to be generous, having just executed a successful raid inside the Emperor's brand-new Long Wall, and the main body were retiring enriched with the plunder of many an opulent country house, and a handful of choice captives to be ransomed, or tortured, or applied to domestic purposes, according to circumstances.

Busy with these thoughts the youth had crossed, almost unconsciously, the grass-land which encircled the grove, and was now close upon the house.

To his intense relief all appeared as quiet and undisturbed as he had left it. The slanting beams of the sunset struck with tender lustre in among the rough stems and massive foliage of the oaks, and kindled upon the sward scattered patches of yellow light. The smoke from the household fires rose serenely above the tree tops, and the whole scene appeared calm and tranquil, as if war was a mere phantom, and bloodshed and rapine vague, impossible occurrences.

But the presentiment of ill which had laid hold on Belitzar was not so easily to be shaken off, and

after a while the complete unnatural silence of the place alarmed him. Presently his quick eyes detected the print of horsehoofs on the smooth turf, and, kneeling down, he examined them with all the care of one thoroughly experienced in woodcraft. "They are none of ours," he muttered. He rose, and standing where he was, called by name on some of the farm servants. His strong voice went ringing and reverberating through the glade, but the only reply except the echo was a shrill neigh, and a horse, bridled and saddled, but riderless, trotted rapidly past him. Then, throwing down his burden, he hurried on through the enclosure, and by the door, which stood wide open, entered the long low chamber which formed the front of the house. There he stopped, paralyzed with horror. On the floor, at some paces from each other, lay the motionless bodies of two men; in the one he recognized the flowing hair and rudely martial accoutrements of a Bulgarian, and the other was his father. The Bulgarian lay on his side quite dead, with the blade of a boar-spear projecting two feet between his shoulders, and his rigid fingers still clutching the hilt of a long poniard.

At the sound of the familiar step and the cry of horror which escaped from his son, the old man opened his eyes and strove to speak. The front of his tunic was covered with half-congealed blood,

showing that some time had elapsed since the fatal wound was inflicted.

Belitzar sprang to his parent's side, and tenderly raising his head, pillow'd it on his knee.

"Move me not, my son," whispered the old man feebly. "Give me some water, and let me die here. I am sped. If the bleeding burst out again, I shall lack strength to speak my last words. The Bulgarian struck home, though the spear was through him."

"Ah, my father! my father!" groaned the young man. "How is this?"

"I kept the promise I made thee, lad," said Phocas, divining the thought that was passing in his son's mind, "until the barbarian reviled the blessed Emperor—whom God protect!—and spoke scoffingly of his faith, and then I could endure no longer. The party had ridden off, well satisfied with what they had found—there is not a hoof or horn left on the farm. But, an hour after, rode back this one for his dagger, which he had left behind. He was a graver and more thoughtful man than the rest. Then he asked me (we had words before) whether I held with the cursed heresy of Cæsar; to which answered I that I knew of no cursed heresy, that in former days I had seen and spoken with his Sacred Majesty's Condescension, and even served my time in the palace itself, and that, go against him who might, I held with Cæsar

in everything. Then the barbarian asked if I durst repeat a Trisagion, and I gave him that which the Emperor hath sanctioned, and which I will repeat in this world while I have breath, and, by the mercy of God, in a better world to come; whereat he shouted, 'Accursed blasphemer of the Holy Trinity, thou shalt die!' and made at me with his dagger; but I, I caught up the spear and let him have it full in the chest as he came on, but the barbarian strained up the shaft like a wild boar and stabbed me through the lungs."

"And were you alone when this happened?" groaned Belitzar. "Were none of our people at hand?"

"Ay, alone," answered the old man. "The men were at their supper when the troop rode up; but at the first glimpse of the spears coming through the trees, they were out of the back windows and scuttling to the woods ere you could look, and maybe, after dark, they may come creeping home again."

"Shameless and cowards!" exclaimed the son, grinding his teeth; "they shall answer dearly for it!"

"Nay, lad, nay," pleaded Phocas; "vex not thyself with anger. Thou wilt have enough besides to trouble thee; and, bethink thee, their nature is not as ours. Be not over-wroth with them; they will mourn over their old master and be sorry when

thou leavest them; for when I am gone this is no longer any place for thee, my son. Thou must go hence to the city."

"To the city?" repeated Belitzar, vacantly.

"I have had it in my heart for long," said Phocas, "and I have considered it well as I lay here waiting for thee. The hand of death is on me, but my mind is clear and unclouded—clearer than it has been before in life. . . . Listen diligently, lad. Thou art made for better things than the tending of a poor farm, the snaring of fish, and the hunting of deer. Our lot has been a humble one, but our race, as I have told thee before now, is noble. I have marked thee, my son Belitzar. The blood of the White Prince is in thy veins, and the spirit of the White Prince is in thy breast. Thou knowest how I have nurtured and instructed thee. It has been an easy task, for thou wert willing and able to learn. When thou takest place among thine equals, thou shalt not be ashamed. When I am dead, bury me under the great oak. Thou wilt find beneath the hearthstone a small store of gold pieces, which I have laid by for thee. Pay the people their due, and let them go their way or remain here, as they will. They may prize the shelter until the barbarians return to take the little that is left. And then depart. Linger not. Make the best of thy way to the great city. That which thy hand findeth to do, do it with all thy

might. Trust in God, and do thy duty. Stand by the Emperor, whosoever he may be. There are great things in store for thee yet, my son. The blessing of God and thy father go with thee."

The last flicker of life seemed to be expended in these final, hardly articulated words, and for a moment Belitzar thought that all was over, for the old man's head fell back and his eyes closed; but suddenly there broke upon the pale countenance that unearthly light which sometimes immediately precedes dissolution, and in clear accents Phocas repeated the Trisagion which had provoked the wrath of his late antagonist—

"Holy, holy, holy ! Lord God of Hosts !
Who wast crucified for us, have mercy upon us ! "

And with this cry, which might have been echoed by angels beyond the quiet sunset, his spirit passed away.

* * * * *

It was not yet midnight when Belitzar, having performed the last sad offices to his father, and bid farewell to the group of mournful and repentant servants, turned his back upon the old farm. There was more than one among the rustics who would willingly have followed his fortunes, but their entreaties to be allowed to accompany him he met with a kindly but decided refusal.

The heart of the young Thracian was very sad

within him. Independently of his deep grief for the loss of the parent whom he had laid to rest beneath the shadow of the trees, and the bitter reflection which would thrust itself upon him that, had he not been absent, matters might have gone differently, the sudden and complete revolution in his prospects appalled him, in spite of his natural courage and strong self-reliance.

After a youth spent among the simple pleasures and mild excitements of a rural life, he shrank from the idea of plunging, unknown and friendless, into the throng and turmoil of the great city ; and his mind ran over the strange tales of its many dangers, snares, and seductions with which his father was wont to beguile the long evenings. In his solitary rambles through the forest, and while idly drifting on the lonely waters of the mere, he had dreamt of such a change. There were times when visions of a higher and busier life, of bearing a nobler part in the great drama of mankind, of possible honour and wealth, flitted across him, even followed by something like discontent and repining at the narrow and uneventful routine of his existence, with no greater changes than were brought about by the seasons, no greater excitements or triumphs than the death of the stag or wild boar. He had dreamt of such things, and under happier circumstances the sanguine impulses of youth might have reasserted themselves, and

his heart throbbed again with the same aspirations; but now, alone after the tragical events of the day, confronted with the hard reality of the change, with the blackness of night before him, and beyond a future terrible in its uncertainty and novelty, it is little wonder that the heart of Belitzar sank within him. But the thought of turning back, or in any way evading his father's last commands, never entered his mind. Resolutely, with his face set towards the far-off city, he strode through the darkness at a pace only possible to one whom a hunter's life had rendered familiar with every step of the surrounding country.

CHAPTER II.

THE BULGARIAN HORSE.

THE morning was breaking bright and cloudless as Belitzar quitted the rough by-roads he had hitherto followed, and struck into the broad highway which led to the Imperial city.

The long travel of the night had served only to calm the excitement of a frame inured to every kind of exertion and unconscious of fatigue. His path lay beside the rapid stream of the Hebrus, running golden in the early light. All nature was awaking fresh and joyous, and the young man's spirits rose with the glorious day.

But before long unmistakable signs warned him that he was nearing the line of march of the invading armies. Here and there a column of blue smoke rising against the clear horizon marked either the bivouac of an outpost or the smouldering ruins of some ill-fated farm; the road he was following had been trampled by the recent hoofs of a body of cavalry, and in the enclosure surrounding

a solitary house which stood at a short distance from the way lay the carcase of a horse from which half a dozen croaking ravens rose heavily at his approach.

The house itself had evidently been for some time abandoned, and was half in ruins, but it seemed likely to afford a tolerably secure retreat amid the wide plain which extended on every side, and on which the figure of even a solitary wanderer became a conspicuous object.

So the young Thracian determined to halt for a while, and to satisfy the calls of hunger which began to make themselves heard with the provisions he had been prudent enough to stow in his wallet.

But as he drew near, the sound of human voices conversing in a low tone proved that the miserable tenement was not without occupants. Approaching cautiously and peeping through one of the many chinks in the tottering wall, he discovered that others had sought the spot for the same purpose as himself. There was not much cause for alarm in the aspect of the present tenants: an elderly man, bent, spare, and meanly clad, a pale lad of about thirteen, and a ragged, bony mule, tethered to one of the projecting rafters, and patiently nibbling the blades of herbage which sprouted among the fallen stones.

The man and boy were similarly engaged on more substantial material, but the share of the

meal which fell to the latter seemed scarcely less meagre than that of the mule. Belitzar felt justified under the circumstances in playing the eavesdropper for a time, and overheard the following conversation :—

“In God’s name, Andreas, eat less voraciously,” whined the man, cutting a thin slice from a long black loaf which lay beside him, and bestowing it grudgingly on his companion ; “this is the third slice you have bolted like a wolf, and it is but a few hours since our last meal. Only small, say you ? Why, at your age, lad, I was glad to get as much to eat in two whole days. Gluttony is a horrid vice, especially in the young. Moderate yourself, Andreas ; subdue your appetite, I say ; we have now barely enough to last us to the city. Buy more ! Holy saints ! the boy talks of buying more. And of whom shall we buy, pray ? Of the accursed peasantry, who would first cheat and then betray us, to save themselves ; or of the accursed barbarians, who would rob us, without mercy, of the last coin ? Besides, we have no money. Have I not told you again and again, Andreas, to remember that we have no money ? Andreas,” he went on, looking cautiously about him, and dropping his voice, “have you the belt safe beneath your shirt ? Answer me, boy ; is it safe ?”

“Ay,” answered the lad, sullenly, “it’s safe enough.”

“Art sure, Andreas? Can you feel it?”

“That can I,” said Andreas; “by the same token that it has slipped, and galls me at every step I take.”

“Be brave, good Andreas; be brave but a little longer. Reflect how I trust you, as boy was never trusted before. Let us but get safe back, and you shall have your reward.”

“Then don’t you forget the gold piece you promised me,” growled Andreas.

“Did I promise you one? Sacred martyrs! is it possible? There, there, I did, I did. For God’s sake raise not your voice; there may be listeners even here. You shall have it, as I promised; but it was rash of me. It is a great deal for one so young—a great deal; and Antonina will stuff and pamper you when we get back, as she always does, a wasteful hussy! Nay, I meant not that; a good, kind girl, but over generous. But if the thieving villains come upon us, which the holy saints forbid! observe me, Andreas, and do as I do. Above all, be calm. Let them search me; they will find little. They will never suspect that any one could entrust aught that was valuable to a lad like thee. Again I say, be calm—calm as I shall be.”

And here, by way of illustrating the equanimity which he expected Andreas to imitate, the speaker paused abruptly, and with a look of amazement and terror dropped to his knees, and from a mouth

full of black bread began pouring forth a ludicrous jumble of prayers to the saints, protestations of poverty, and lamentations for his hard fate ; the cause of this outburst being the apparition of Belitzar, who had taken the liberty of stepping quietly in at the broken-down door.

It needed all the young Thracian's laughing assurances to pacify the terrified elder, and convince him that the dreaded intruder was none other than a wayfarer bound, like himself, to Constantinople, and equally averse to making the acquaintance of the barbarian marauders.

“ God be thanked ! ” he ejaculated, as Belitzar seated himself and began a peaceful attack upon his provisions. “ God be thanked ! I took you for one of Vitalian's robbers. Not that we have aught to lose, good youth. I am but a poor ferryman, Baro by name, whom bad luck and bad counsel have brought into this cursed predicament. I am penniless at present—absolutely penniless ; but the barbarians, when they find little, torture and slay. Life is sweet even to the old and broken ; and this poor boy, it were hard he should suffer on my account.”

Here Andreas looked up with such a twinkle of roguish humour in his black eyes, that Belitzar found it hard to preserve his gravity ; but speedily diverted the boy's attention, and earned his eternal gratitude by presenting him with a lump of dried

venison, on which he at once employed his white teeth as ravenously as though food had not passed his lips for a week.

“ Saint Euphemia ! ” exclaimed Baro ; “ the good meat ! And to see how he devours it ! Have you no shame, Andreas ? ”

“ Let the boy eat,” said Belitzar ; “ he is young, and has far to go. If you will follow his example, there is venison enough for us all.”

“ I thank thee, good youth, I have no heart to eat more. You have a right to do as you please with your own, but the boy has eaten amply already, and it goes to my heart to see the needless consumption of precious food. Ah, yes, it is far to go ; a weary journey, and beset with danger at every step. Saints assist us ! how shall we ever reach the city ? If once I find myself safe back in the ferry-boat again, the fiend take me if I ever travel further than from one bank to another in my lawful calling. Idiot that I was, to undertake a journey in these unsettled times. Nor would I have ventured but that there were certain moneys due to me on mortgage at Philippopolis, and the payment was tardy. It has cost me a month, ay, a whole month of labour and pains, to get my rights ; and meanwhile the country is overrun again, and—but—but I obtained not the money,” he stammered, recollecting himself, “ not a penny of it. How should I, when the war has left all

men poor alike? Believe me, I swear to you by all——”

“It is no concern of mine,” exclaimed Belitzar, cutting the old rascal short in his perjury; “keep your own counsel. I care not whether you got your money or not. I never pry into other men’s business, so spare yourself the trouble of swearing. I have no more desire to meet with rogues than you have, for I carry my all about me; but he who would rob me of it must prove himself the better man.”

The dull eyes of Baro brightened for a moment. “Ah, the blessing of youth and strength and confidence! Saints! what an arm!” he exclaimed, feeling the grand swell of Belitzar’s muscles with his lanky fingers; “you could row a full barge single-handed to Sigæum. But reflect, young Hercules, on the danger of resistance; and these fiends come not singly, but in hordes. The odds are too great; to resist is to act like a madman.”

The caution was fair enough, and pretty well in accordance with Belitzar’s own ideas, but nevertheless the Thracian’s innate courage and honesty rebelled against the cowardice and hypocrisy of his companion. “I must take my chance,” he said, rising with the words and preparing to resume his journey.

Either the ferryman noticed the young Thracian’s ill-concealed antipathy, and was anxious in some

degree to redeem his own character, or in spite of his pacific principles he was really unwilling to lose the fellowship of so stalwart a comrade ; anyhow, he dropped the whine he had hitherto affected, and spoke with a more frank and genial tone.

“ Nay, nay, never be vexed with a broken-down old man for being timorous ; youth can never comprehend the fears of age. Maybe I was a bold man myself once. Methinks now I can read your history plainly enough. Up to the present a country life, innocent and wholesome, and now the old home abandoned or broken up, or perhaps worse. There, forgive me ; I meant not to pain you. Ay, ay, it is but too common a case. And you, young, strong, full of hope and courage, bound to seek your fortune in the Capital. Well, if thews and sinews, and a face for men to trust and women to fall in love with, could get a boy on instead of leading him—especially the latter qualification—to destruction at a gallop, you won’t have long to wait. Perhaps you have friends in Constantinople ? ”

“ None,” replied Belitzar, with a touch of despondency in his voice.

“ Hearken, then, my young friend. I have a bargain to propose. We are bound on the same journey, why should we not travel together ? I have, God knows, neither youth, strength, nor courage, but I have the one thing you lack, experience. I am city born and bred. I know its

ins and outs, its intrigues, pitfalls, and devilries too well. Let the lion protect the mouse as far as the city, and when we arrive there it will be hard if the mouse find not some means of doing the lion a good turn. I will ensure you a hearty welcome from my kindred, and lodging and food as cheap as—cheaper than you will find it elsewhere. You may guess that I am not one to encourage riotous living. If you care to exercise your muscles at the ferry while waiting for something better to turn up—and yet it is a safe and wholesome calling; you might do worse than stick to it—you shall have board and lodging, such as they are, free. I'll warrant you know how to handle an oar, and drag a net too. There is grand work for a man, and sport besides, when the tunny season begins. How say you? Is it a bargain? Men call me shrewd; some who don't understand me use harsher terms. Little care I. But no man ever knew Baro the ferryman go back from his word."

With this suspicious piece of self-laudation he concluded his long speech and waited for Belitzar's reply.

It did not take the latter many moments to decide. The advantage of the proposal struck him as evident, friendless and inexperienced as he was, in spite of his first repugnance to the proposer.

"So be it," he said. "I accept your offer. I will stand by you through good and evil until we

reach Constantinople, and there, for food and shelter, I will give my services to the best of my ability. It rests with you to deal fairly by me."

"I had far sooner be your friend than your enemy, lad," said the other, admiringly, as he weighed in his own the broad, sinewy hand which the Thracian held out. "The man whom you strike or take by the throat will hardly want a second dose. Then we are agreed; it is a compact. And now if the coast is clear we may as well be moving; it must be done sooner or later, worse luck! Unfasten the mule, Andreas."

Andreas, who was transformed under the influence of the venison and a long pull out of Belitzar's wine bottle, obeyed briskly, and the three—Baro mounted on the mule on which also were slung the wallets of the party—were soon progressing slowly along the high-road.

In this manner they travelled for the greater part of the day without molestation; but the nerves of Baro were sorely tried by the pillaged and deserted aspect of the hamlets they passed through, and the accounts he gathered with morbid eagerness from the scattered inhabitants.

On the whole it appeared that the barbarians had behaved in a more humane and forbearing spirit than might have been expected, contenting themselves with appropriating all the provisions they could find, and everything which appeared of

value, and seldom resorting to atrocity unless they were either drunk, or were resisted, or suspicious of concealment.

Late in the afternoon the road ran through a thick grove of trees. Out of compassion to Andreas, who, in spite of an occasional ride, was becoming terribly footsore, Belitzar was on the point of suggesting a halt, when with a yell a dozen Bulgarians dashed out of the thicket, and in the twinkling of an eye the little party found themselves surrounded and taken prisoners.

At the first alarm, indeed, the Thracian instinctively brought his hunting-spear to the level, and another moment would probably have seen a Bulgarian transfixated, and the three travellers, in a natural sequence of events, made mincemeat of, had not terror inspired the ferryman with the greatest presence of mind. With a despairing shriek he threw himself like a monkey clean off the mule on to Belitzar's shoulders, and pinioned him with a force of which his meagre frame seemed incapable; thus hampered, the youth was easily disarmed, and made safe by having his elbows secured with a thong behind his back. This exploit of Baro seemed greatly to tickle the humour of his captors, to judge by their horse-laughter and the tremendous claps they bestowed on his unfortunate back as they led the prisoners to a glade at some distance within the wood, where the

rest of the band were busied in picketing their horses among the rich grass bordering a streamlet, flaying and cutting up sheep, collecting firewood, and otherwise preparing for a bivouac.

Stretched under a tree near the brook, and placidly watching the eddy of the gentle current round the neck of a tall wine jar, lay a handsome, devil-may-care-looking fellow, whom the gold collar round his neck and generally rich accoutrements pointed out as the officer in command of the troop.

The bustle and hum caused by the arrival of the new-comers roused him from his interesting study, and the quiet smile of pleasing anticipation changed into a frown as he inquired in a tone half angry, half complaining, "what the devil they meant by bringing in prisoners at that time, instead of attending to their duty? Useless beggars! they are all squeezed dry by this time. But that's a fine lad," he added, as his eye fell upon the tall form of Belitzar. "Undo his arms, some of you—what are you afraid of?—and bring him here."

"So, my boy," he continued, after hearing the details of the capture, "if it had not been for this wise old gentleman—your father, possibly—it seems you would have made a fool of yourself, and driven a foot of steel into one of my troop. Lucky for you you didn't. I can't answer for my fellows if they see blood. And now, who are you? Whence do you come, and whither are you going?"

“ So please your Valour,” faltered Baro, to whom these last words were addressed, “ I am a peaceful citizen of Constantinople. I work the ferry from the Chalcedonian Stairs ; a poor man, but honest and orthodox. I swear it, gallant sir, orthodox to the backbone. I utterly loathe and abhor the vile heresy of the new Trisagion which—— ”

“ In the devil’s name, man, spare us your cant,” interrupted the officer, with so fierce an accent that Baro jumped back in terror ; “ it is lost on me. I care not a curse if you are as orthodox as the Pope, or the rankest heretic in the empire. You may crucify the Trinity, one and all, or not at all, just as you please, and sing as many Trisagions as there are links in this chain, so long as I don’t hear the noise. I have enough to think of in keeping my fellows in hand and obeying orders. And pray what brings your orthodoxy so far from the city ? Is it waxing over-warm for the faithful just at present ? ”

“ I am returning from Philippopolis, noble sir, whither I have been to visit a sick relation.”

“ You don’t say so. I shouldn’t have suspected you of such a thing. And did the sick relation by any chance die and leave you enough to find a ransom for yourself and this fine boy ? ”

“ Alas, no ! not an obole, your Valour. Beyond a few coins for necessary expenses, I have nothing whatever.”

"Upon my soul, I believe you are lying," said the officer, emphatically. "Falsehood is written on your face. You don't look like a man to undertake a journey for nothing, in war time especially. And this youth?"

"We joined company only this morning," replied Baro, accidentally speaking the truth. "He has left home and is bound to seek his fortune in the city, and in return for the poor shelter of my roof has agreed to give me temporary aid in the ferry-boat."

"Temporary aid in devildom! He belies his looks if he sticks long to such a pitiful occupation. Never tell me you don't know what you are about when you bargained with that pair of shoulders to row your city dames and gallants to and fro between the pleasure-gardens. Well, my good man, I must put you under requisition like the rest. Times are hard and life is brief, and we are short of ready cash, wherewith to drink all your good healths when we enter Adrianople. Can you find that little ransom I spoke of, or must I employ coercion?"

"The demand is unjust," exclaimed Belitzar, boldly. "We are no prisoners of war, but neutrals and peaceful travellers."

"A very peaceful traveller you proved yourself just now, my lad," said the officer, smiling pleasantly. "I ought to have known that you

could not be this man's son. My heroic young peasant, I adore justice in the abstract, but circumstances compel me to violate my feelings.— I ask you again, most orthodox sir" (this to Baro), "must I employ coercion?" He was evidently amusing himself with the ferryman's terror.

"I have nothing," gasped the unhappy man. "On my oath, your Valour, I have nothing but the few coins I spoke of."

"The worse for you. Here, search these fellows and turn out their bundles. They may be spies, and spies we always flay. There, never mind that poor half-starved devil," meaning Andreas.

Baro turned green with fear as the Bulgarians roughly examined his seedy garments; but when it came to the turn of Belitzar, the latter drew out a leathern pouch from inside his tunic and threw it on the ground at the officer's feet.

"Hands off!" he said. "May the blood and the curse of the father who gave it to me cling to the murderers and robbers who take it!"

"Whe-ew," whistled the officer, as he quietly proceeded to examine the purse which one of his men picked up and handed to him. "Gently, gently, my fine fellow. Murderers and robbers! Is that the way you speak of the troops serving under the pious Vitalian in this most holy war? Let me recommend you, young man, to be more

choice in your terms, and less fierce in your looks, or you will find the stirrup-leather round your elbows again; and it won't come off so easily, I promise you."

But Belitzar's blood was up, for he recognized the dress and arms of the band as identical with those of the man who had slain Phocas, and he answered bitterly—

"Choice in my terms, when only last night my father lost his life at the hands of one of your troopers, and to-day I lose my all to find drink for his comrades!"

"Well, it won't go far amongst us," said the officer calmly, as he counted out the contents of the purse. Twelve, thirteen, fourteen—I am sorry for you, my poor boy—fifteen, sixteen, seventeen—these are the horrors of war—eighteen, nineteen, twenty golden effigies of Anastasius the divine. You say your father was killed last night by one of my troopers?"

"I say also," replied Belitzar fiercely, "and I thank God as I say it, that the man who killed him lay dead too, with a boar-spear halfway out between his shoulders."

"The devil he did! This is interesting. Your family seems to be tolerably handy with the boar-spear. I have a sudden light; I think I can account for my missing lieutenant.—Holloa, Etzel! what did you tell me about Scotta?"

“He left his dagger at a farmhouse we visited, captain, and rode back for it. He has not been heard of since; his horse rejoined the troop this morning.”

“This youngster says his father was killed last night by one of our fellows who seems to have been killed also.”

“Likely enough to have been the lieutenant, sir. There was a fierce old fellow at the farm—the master—about the build of this boy, and not unlike him in the face. He had words with Scotta before we left.”

“And why didn’t you send back to look after your comrade?”

“Our orders were to rejoin you, sir, as quickly as possible, and we thought he could take good care of himself.”

“So he could generally, especially when it came to talking. And after all his bluster to get himself killed by a pig-sticking peasant! Well, if the father was of a pattern with the son, I suppose he is not to be blamed so much. Now, my boy, you won’t believe me when I tell you that I am really very sorry for you. I like the look of you and your boldness. At the same time, what has happened will no doubt be the making of you. Naturally you are grieved at your father’s death; in the country, I believe, people frequently are. But when you have got over it, instead of vegetating

in bucolic obscurity, you will fulfil your destiny. Still I am so sorry for you that if I could have found any decent sum upon that old humbug, I would have restored—say, half your patrimony, but really— Silence there! Now listen to those fellows; they don't like the son of the man who killed their comrade; they have outlandish ideas of revenge.—But really, in spite of my gorgeous appearance, I am penniless just at present. True, we can help ourselves as a rule to what we require, but a gentleman should never be actually without money as I am. Therefore I am reluctantly compelled to borrow these coins—until we meet again. It may be in Constantinople, on the water; you shall row me about with some of the fair Byzantines. Until then I will borrow them, with the exception of two, which I beg to return to you for immediate expenses."

And with these words he politely extended two of the gold pieces between his finger and thumb.

But the heart of Belitzar was bursting with stifled rage and indignation, and he turned away without speaking.

"I shall not hold them out much longer," said the officer. "Will one of you take them?"

Terrified as he was, Baro made a convulsive movement towards the gold, but he was anticipated by Andreas, who in a moment sprang forward and clutched it from the officer's hand.

“ Thank you, my lad,” said the officer, languidly resuming his former posture; “ you seem to me the most needy and deserving. And now, my friends, if you choose to join the men at their supper, you are welcome—to your own mutton. But if you take my advice you will get out of their company as soon as you can, and make the best of your way to Adrianople. You will find yourselves safe there; we shall not occupy it until next month. I will give you a pass through our lines. I regret to deprive you of your mule, but we are short of baggage horses. By-the-bye, I have an uncle in Constantinople, one Malchus—nice old man. He kicked me out and disinherited me long ago—ten thousand torments rend him! ” he exclaimed, grinding his teeth, whilst his swarthy face whitened with fury; but calming himself in an instant, he resumed his bantering tone. “ If you come across the old gentleman, be good enough to say that his late nephew Sittas, now captain of Bulgarian horse, proposes shortly to pay him a visit. And now farewell! Etzel! see these people safe out of camp and on their road; and let no one injure a hair of their heads, or, by hell, his life shall answer for it! ”

If Etzel could have foreseen that years after his own people, under Zabergan, would be repulsed at the moment when Constantinople seemed within their grasp, by the tall youth whom he escorted

out of camp, then become a grey-haired general, he might have disobeyed orders.

The trio were not far upon their road when Baro began to condole with Belitzar, and to lament that his own poverty prevented him from bearing his share of the loss ; but the Thracian sternly silenced him.

“ Cease this hypocrisy ; it is useless. Think you I do not know of the belt which for these many hours has galled the flesh of your wretched drudge ? I overheard your conversation in the ruin. Had I been base enough to betray you I might have saved myself.”

Baro stopped abruptly. “ God forgive me ! ” he exclaimed. “ I never believed there was such goodness in mortal man. Nay, take my hand. Take it. You have truly stood by me in good and evil, and may God desert me in my utmost need if I ever forget it ! ”

And then Andreas slipped up, and holding out the two pieces said, “ I only took them for you ; you were kind to me, and I won’t forget it either.” And so, with better feelings and better spirits than hitherto, they went on their way, and in due course arrived at Adrianople.

CHAPTER III.

VOX POPULL.

MUCH to the disquietude of Baro, it was after sunset when the travellers eventually found themselves within the gates of Constantinople, and beginning that which he considered, not without reason, a very dangerous part of their journey. This alarm was somewhat incomprehensible to Belitzar, who was ignorant of the ways of great cities, and incredulous as to the extent to which lawlessness and disorder could prevail even under the very noses of the Imperial officials. But on this point he was destined to be enlightened before long.

Again, to Belitzar the throng which filled the streets was remarkable only by its occasional density and incessant babble, its apparent confusion and want of purpose; but to Baro's practised eyes there was something unusual, and so to speak expectant, in the aspect and attitude of the crowd. Monks were at no time an uncommon sight in Constantinople, but this night they abso-

lutely swarmed ; they hurried by in sombre, silent bands, they stood together in groups at the corners of the streets, conversing in low, eager tones, and they stalked about singly or in couples with the grave, observant air of sentinels or watchmen.

Nor was the muster of the partisans of the Factions much inferior to that of the monks ; and about them also there was an air of alertness and pre-occupation entirely opposed to the listless swagger which these worthies affected when not actually engaged in their favourite pursuits. But more remarkable still was the harmony and cordiality which appeared to exist between the rival colours, between the wearers of the Blue and the wearers of the Green. They exchanged short, significant greetings, talked together peaceably like ordinary mortals, and even went so far as to stroll amicably arm in arm. "What the devil is up to-night ?" was Baro's reflection as he noted these peculiarities of society. "When these blackguards fraternize there must be some enormous rascality afoot. Would to God we were safe at home !" and he anxiously felt the precious belt, now transferred from Andreas's aching sides to the shelter of his own tunic. Belitzar rallied his companion on his fears, and called his attention to the fact that the moon was rising, and would soon pour a flood of light upon their way.

"So much the worse," was Baro's encouraging



answer. "In the dark a cautious man may slip by unperceived, or dodge down a by-street and lie quiet until the danger is over; but moonlight is a godsend to these ruffians. They can see you coming, or follow you at a distance, estimate your numbers and strength to a nicety, pounce upon you out of the shadows, and use bludgeon and knife with all the greater certainty. Give me a moonless night for safety."

But for the young Thracian, as soon as he recovered from his first bewilderment, the half-revealed, half-shrouded splendour, the nocturnal bustle and whirl of the great city, were replete with novel excitement and delight. In the main streets and squares through which they passed his eyes rested with almost childish solemnity of wonder upon the massive edifices; on stupendous façades mysteriously outlined against the purple sky, and backed by the steadfast sheen of gilded domes and spires; on dim vistas of polished columns and spectral statuary gleaming through the dusk; on fountains gushing musically as his own native rills, from elaborate piles of bronze and marble; on the tall fronts of palaces rich with sculpture, now basking serenely in the silver moonlight, now tinged with a transient yellow glare as the torch-bearers of some glittering equipage hurried past. In the narrow, tortuous thoroughfares he stood amazed before the rows of open shop-fronts, where

goods of every description—of the costliest and the commonest, gold and silver work, jewellery, arms, raiment, provisions, wine jars, fruit and flowers, the products of every art and trade, the gathered output of an empire—were exposed in profusion under a blaze of torchlight, which flashed upon the equally varied garb and countenance of the never-ending stream of humanity. Now pausing before the court of some mighty church, he caught through the open door-curtains a glimpse of splendid shrines and blazing tapers, of gorgeous painting and mosaic. The outer air itself was heavy with the perfume of the rolling incense, and his ears were ravished by the harmonious thunder of the chant. And again some low archway would reveal beyond its delicate ironwork a vestibule paved with squares of shining marble, a fountain spouting under broad exotic leaves, and a vision of white drapery, whiter arms, and glossy hair, while the sound of song and laughter floated sweetly forth upon the night. But, young and rustic as he was, the intelligence of Belitzar was too deep-toned to acknowledge only the vulgar emotions of pleasurable wonder and curiosity; he experienced a passing thrill of yearning despondency. “Can I hope to become anything in a city like this?” he sighed to himself. “Were it not better to have remained at all risks in the solitude beneath the hills—to have waited patiently for better times,

to have tilled the soil and gathered the harvest, or, failing this, to have been master at least over the beast of the forest and the fowl of the air—than to have come hither to struggle unregarded, and to sink, in spite of all my struggles, in the whirlpool of the terrible, glorious city? And yet my father knew of all this, and he bade me come. Did he not say with his dying breath, ‘There are great things in store for thee, my son?’ The words of dying men are sacred; their eyes see far. But how can it be possible?”

Had not Belitzar been occupied with these thoughts, he might have noticed the suspicious conduct of three men out of a group of idlers, who, after staring intently at Baro and Andreas as they passed across the full light of a blazing shop-front, quietly slipped away from their companions, and strolled carelessly in the same direction as our friends. The latter had now quitted the central and more frequented portion of the city, and were approaching the comparatively dignified and tranquil neighbourhood of St. Sophia and the palace. But here, unluckily, true to the cautious policy which he had advocated Baro led the way into a labyrinth of deserted by-streets, narrow, steep, and irregular, where even the bright moonlight scarcely succeeded in penetrating between the overhanging eaves. They were about halfway down one of these gloomy alleys, when said

Andreas, "There is some one following us," and surely enough rapid footsteps became audible in their rear. "Keep in the shadow and hurry on," whispered Baro; "we may escape them yet, if we can only reach the next turning." But their pursuers, having at last tracked their intended victims into a place suitable for their purpose, discarded all strategy, and coming up at a run soon overtook the party.

The greeting of the first who arrived was short and to the point.

"Now then, you infernal old miser, hand over the coin."

At this the Thracian faced about and tightened his grasp on the stout cudgel which he had cut to replace the lost boar-spear, while Baro began his usual lament and protestations of abject poverty. But the man who had spoken was evidently well acquainted with the ferryman's movements and character.

"None of your lies," he answered; "they won't go down with us. I know where you have been to, and what you went for, and you are not the man to return without it. So out with it, if you don't want a slit across the windpipe."

"And do you," replied Belitzar, stepping forward, "stand back and leave us to go our way in peace, if you don't want a cracked skull."

"Who the hell are you?" exclaimed the ruffian,

having his attention thus forcibly directed to the Thracian. "Some cursed young provincial! Whoever you are, my bantam, take my advice and don't meddle with our city games. We are three to one, for the other two count for nothing. Let the old usurer give up the money quietly—we have as much right to it, and more need of it, than he has—and then go your way in peace, to the devil, if you like."

"Ah, miscreant! I know you now," shrieked Baro. "Have I travelled these weary miles, and wasted weeks in wringing my due from your accursed brother, only to be plundered again by you? Never; I will die first!"

"If you please," said the other, shortly, "so long as we get the money afterwards;" and he sprang forward, followed by his companions.

Baro uttered a howl of terror and rage, but the Thracian silently clenched his teeth and stood firm. Quick as lightning his hand, trained in many a forest encounter, brought down the rough end of the cudgel into the assailant's face, who, with a groan, staggered back against his comrade and then fell flat on the stones.

"Run," cried Belitzar, in a voice which rang through the night—"run and shout for aid. I can keep them at bay. There must be true men about who will help us against these scoundrels;" and he caught the second bravo a whistling blow on

the fingers, which sent the knife he held spinning across the street.

But for Baro, who was half paralyzed with terror, it was not so easy to run. Shout for aid, however, he did, and in this he was nobly assisted by the boy Andreas, who, somewhat in the rear, was tugging and scratching at a loose paving-stone in a meritorious attempt to provide himself with an offensive weapon. At this crisis the sudden tramp of feet was heard from behind, and some half-dozen men, attracted by the cries, came scudding round the nearest corner to the scene of action.

“Ah, my God!” groaned Baro, “there are more of them. We are lost!”

“Surely I know that voice,” exclaimed the leader of the new arrivals. “Who calls for help?”

“I do—I, Baro, the ferrymen. Help!—in the name of God, help!”

“Come on, boys,” cried the man who had hailed. “Friends in trouble. Lay into the rascals! Blue or Green!”

But the enemy, of whatever colour he might be, did not wait to be laid into. The man whom Belitzar had felled regained his feet with a sudden effort, and, rushing off, disappeared with his comrades into the darkness. Luckily for them, they had a fair start, and those of the new-comers who gave chase returned after a while considerably out of

breath, having lost their quarry among the intricacies of the surrounding alleys.

“Never mind, lads,” said the man who acted as leader; “they’ve got something to remember the evening by;” and he pointed to the large spots of blood which were discernible even in the obscure light. “What’s that glittering? Pick it up. A knife, by God!” he continued, examining the object which was handed to him. “They meant business. And, I believe, a name on the handle; but I can’t make it out in this light. We’ll take it with us. Now, what a fool a man must be to put his name on a bit of property like this! Sure to tell tales some day or other. Well, whatever that name may be, Giton the Cretan sets a black mark against it. We shall know two of them, anyhow; this brave lad set his own mark on the other. They must have a lesson not to meddle with friends. And to choose to-night, too, when there is so much work on hand! Come, boys, let’s be moving. Here, you Basil and Rufin, see them safe home, and rejoin us at the cistern of Mocisia. As for you, my rustic hero, how say you—will you throw in with as for another spree? No? Well, well, you are young to the work yet. So, farewell! We shall meet again if all goes well to-night. You will find Demas at home; he has his reasons for not joining us, and I can’t gainsay them. Good night! May your sleep be sounder than Cæsar’s

is likely to be." And with these strange words the reckless, good-humoured partisan strode off with the rest of his followers, leaving the two he had named to escort the travellers.

In a few minutes they reached one of the minor gates opening on to the harbour, where, again to Baro's surprise and mystification, the place of the usual sentry was occupied by two or three cloaked figures, with whom their conductors exchanged a few whispered words before they were allowed to pass. Then, diving under the arch, they caught sight of the gleaming expanse of the Golden Horn, and shortly arrived at the house of Demas the charioteer, which stood within a few yards of the ferryman's. It was pleasantly situated outside the wall on a projection of the land, surrounded by a garden, and overhung by a tuft of ilex and Judas trees. Here their escort left them, and with an ejaculation of thanksgiving, which was probably sincere, Baro knocked at the door of his brother's house.

It was opened by a brunette of eighteen, who, for grace and prettiness, would have been difficult to match, even in Constantinople, that city of dark-eyed beauties.

"If it isn't uncle!" she exclaimed, as the light fell upon Baro's face. "You old dear! where have you been all this time? We thought you were lost;" and she cordially embraced Baro, and then turned, half shyly, half coquettishly, to Belitzar.

“Well,” thought the simple Thracian to himself as he looked on, “there must be some good in the old fellow, after all, or a girl like that would never be so fond of him.” And, indeed, the bright spot in Baro’s not attractive character was his affection and tenderness for his niece, which does not affect the fact that Antonina was a shrewd and far-sighted young woman.

“What! Baro back again?” exclaimed a deep, cheery voice from the inner room, and the speaker presently followed his greeting.

Demas, the half-brother of Baro, and head charioteer to the Green Faction, was a man about forty years old, scarcely of middle height, and rather spare in the lower limbs, but with an enormous development of chest and shoulder. It was remarked of him that above the rim of the chariot he was a giant, and below it a dwarf. His dark-grey eyes were keen as a hawk’s, and his face full of resolution and good temper.

“Welcome, brother, welcome!” he said, exchanging a fraternal salute with the ferryman. “I am heartily glad to see you again, alive and well. We made sure you had fouled the goal badly this journey, and couldn’t win home at any price. Ah! and little Andreas, too? Poor lad! he looks like a weakly foal, all head and legs. And who is this? By Jehu, a splendid young fellow!”

“My friend and preserver,” said Baro, with un-

wonted warmth, "to whom I owe both life and purse."

"And therefore," said Demas, "a friend of mine, and of all who belong to me;" and he held out his sinewy hand and bestowed on the Thracian a grip like a vice. "And now, come in—come in, all of you. Andreas, too, you shall eat with us to-night, boy. And, Antonina, bustle with the supper, and bring down a jar of the old red wine."

With an admiring glance at the handsome stranger the girl went out, and hustled to such purpose, that before long the table was laden with a display of eatables and drinkables which showed the views of the charioteer on these points to be diametrically opposed to those of his brother.

But on this occasion the latter had the good taste to refrain from any remark on what he no doubt considered ruinous prodigality, and fell to with the rest without a murmur.

Demas, like a wise man, waited until the hunger of the party was satisfied, and even the voracity of Andreas was incapable of more, before he called upon the ferryman to give an account of himself and doings. And then Baro, inspired by the generous contents of the jar, launched into a certainly graphic and tolerably truthful narrative of his adventures, not sparing himself, and describing the conduct of Belitzar in terms which drew loud approbation from Demas and brought an extra sparkle into Antonina's bright eyes.

“ My boy,” said the charioteer, addressing the Thracian when Baro had concluded, “ for grandly grown as you are, you are but a boy, after all—I wish I had a dozen like you,—this brother of mine, although he is not without his good points, is, as you may have found out, a hard-headed, close-fisted old beggar, and I gather that he has been one too many for you already. But let that pass. If you have a mind to stand to your bargain with him, the best I can say is that it will keep you out of mischief for the moment, and you are as likely a lad to get into it as I have seen for some time. In the present state of the city, getting into mischief means, as easy as not, being quietly put out of sight altogether, or brought home carefully on a stretcher. When things are settled again—God knows when that may be—we will see what can be done for you. But whether or no, whichever way you decide, if ever you lack coin or shelter while Demas is to the fore, why then, in the next race may my wheel foul the goal at the turn, or my team swerve when they feel the thong at the finish, and those, I take it, are about the worst disasters which can befall a man in this world of sorrows. And now you ask,” he said, turning to Baro, “ what is going to happen this evening, and why I am not abroad with the rest? The last question is easy enough, but to answer the first satisfactorily would take a superior style of prophet, and, beyond a fair

guess at the winning team upon occasion, I am not great in that line. You see, when Cæsar had got rid of Macedonius—and, fair or foul, I say that was a master-stroke—he had the race in his own hands and the course clear before him. But what does he do? Instead of taking things easily and slipping quietly home, he lays on to the people harder than ever; lets them feel curb and lash at the same moment; drives them wild—maddens them. And what is the consequence? At last they take the bits between their teeth and bolt right away, and it's a hundred to one they upset the chariot and pitch him out! That's about the long and short of it."

"But how about to-night?" asked Baro, with a natural desire for more detail.

"To-night," answered Demas, "there is going to be a demonstration, and a very pretty specimen of the article it is likely to be. Macedonius has been writing again, and the monks have spread copies of his letters all through the city. The people know that Vitalian will be down upon us before long, and they are making their effort just at the right time. The whole thing has been planned and carried out by regular steps. Half a dozen deputations have waited on Cæsar, humbly setting forth the prayers of his loving subjects for a little more religious toleration—that is what they call it—meaning, I take it, that they ask leave

to get to heaven after their own fashion. But he—he wouldn't listen to one of them; bundled them out of the palace as fast as they came in. If it hadn't been for Proclus, would have thrown the whole lot into prison. No; one course for all, and the man who swerves an inch to right or left to be damned here and hereafter; that's Cæsar's idea as it was the Patriarch's, only they differed in the particulars. To-night again all will be done in order. Before the people proceed to extremities, the public herald will once more proclaim their wrongs and call upon Cæsar for redress. If he condescends to notice this appeal, there's a chance that all may go smoothly; if not——" and Demas shrugged his broad shoulders and whistled gently.

"But the soldiers! the guards!" broke in Belitzar, indignantly. "Will they suffer Cæsar to be bullied by a mob? Never!"

"The soldiers! the guards!" echoed Demas, contemptuously. "Ay, you think a good deal of the military down in the provinces, but when you have seen half as much of them as I have, you will change your note. The soldiers! Why, man, to begin with, the mass and the best of them are at this minute outside the Makron Teikos, waiting to be thrashed again by Vitalian, and of the stay-at-homes half are dead against Cæsar in their religious convictions—that is the proper phrase. The guards! Ay, if they were all of your temper,

lad, they might make a fight of it, and get beaten like men ; but what are they, these Doryphori ? A set of swaggering dandies, gorgeous in a procession and invincible in the guard-room ; useless and contemptible when there is real work on hand ; fellows who think more of the gold on the scabbard than the steel inside, of the polish of the cuirass than the stoutness of the heart beneath it—— ”

“ No, no, not all of them, father,” interrupted Antonina ; “ you are too hard upon the guards.”

“ Well,” chuckled Demas, “ perhaps we’ll except one or two of them, including a young gentleman by name Paris. He is better than most of them, I confess ; brave and honest, more like the old sort. But what I say is true of the mass. The purchase system has played the mischief with the army.”

“ But will they not strike a blow for their Emperor ? ” exclaimed Belitzar, aghast at these revelations.

“ Not if they are wise,” replied Demas, coolly. “ At the muster to-night there will be fifteen thousand monks, the fiercest customers on earth, regularly marshalled and told off for duty—Sabas and Theodosius are the leaders—and every man of them eager to become a martyr on the smallest provocation. And forty thousand men of both Fac-tions, every one of them ready to go to the devil at a moment’s notice for the chance of novelty or a couple of gold pieces ; and there are plenty of the

“After flying about just now, never mind where they come from.”

“Fifteen thousand monks?” said Baro, inquiringly.

“Ay, rather more than less. They have been coming in lately by hundreds a day; every village in the neighbourhood has been full of them. They tell me a whole army has been encamped for weeks in Chalcedon, round St. Euphemia.”

“And the Factions have combined?” asked Baro again.

“Yes, there is a coalition; that is, instead of cutting each others’ throats about trifles, they have agreed to derive mutual profit and pleasure from cutting the throats of society in general, if need be, and all to the glory of God! Poor Religion, what a deal she has to answer for! And now you know nearly as much about it as I do. And you, my young hero, can understand why I recommend you to stay quietly here for the present. For myself, the Emperor has been a good friend and a liberal patron to me, and although I think he is in the wrong I will never raise a finger against him. More than that, if it came to a pinch—— But let that pass; it is easy to swagger over a wine-cup. Ah! my lad, look now at your flushed cheek, and your eyes on fire; you are burning to be in the midst of it.”

“My father once held office in the palace,” said

Belitzar ; "he loved the Emperor, and gave his life to prove it."

"Yes, yes ; no need to tell me that you are well bred and well trained," said Demas, kindly ; "you will show that fast enough one of these days, if you get a fair start. The greater reason not to throw yourself away before you do get one. Take my advice, remain here quietly with us for a time at least, and take no shame to yourself for doing so. The voice of the people is speaking now, my lad, and that of no one man, however bold, can be heard against it. You might as well try to stop the clamour when the chariots are spinning round the goals for the seventh time and the white cord is in sight. We shall hear all that is going on hour by hour ; I have arranged for that. There may be work enough for us all by-and-by, citizens and soldiers alike, if Vitalian comes too near. We may be dissatisfied with Anastasius, but we don't mean to have the Goth in his place. Stay here, and when the proper time comes, I will be the first to say to you, 'Come out and show the stuff you are made of.'"

Here Baro, whose head had dropped gradually on to his chest, snored loudly.

"The old boy is right," said the charioteer, finishing his wine. "Wake him up, Antonina, and let them be off to bed."

CHAPTER IV.

THE LODGE OF THE RISING SUN.

OUTWARDLY and in daylight there was nothing noticeable about the sixth house in the Alley of Hammers, leading out of the Street of the Docks, in Sycæ, the Thirteenth Region of Old Constantinople, and now Galata, beyond the fact that it was a dwelling of a superior kind to those immediately surrounding it, which were chiefly the cottages of artisans and dockworkers, and had about it an air of peaceful, not to say sombre, retirement. It stood alone, with a walled court containing a few shrubs on three sides. The windows were few, high, and narrow, and the front next the street was rather incongruously thrown open as a kind of marine store, remarkable only for the scanty assortment and apparent unsaleableness of the stock-in-trade it exhibited. Any one who could have ascended to the flat roof would have found that it commanded on the left a depressing prospect over the open space devoted to public executions, and on



the right a scarcely more cheerful one over the premises belonging to the monastery of St. Conon. Had the visitor been further able to penetrate to the principal chamber of the first floor on the night of Saturday, the — of June, A.D. 516, he might have wished himself elsewhere.

This chamber, which was of considerable size and altogether devoid of windows, being lighted during the daytime by a skylight carefully blinded from within, was now brilliantly illuminated by a transparent device inlaid into the end wall and representing the beams of the rising sun springing from a field of azure. The extremity of the room which fronted this symbol was semicircular and occupied by a narrow table of corresponding shape, at which were seated fifteen men, seven on each side, and one, acting as president, in the centre. Over the back of each seat hung a cloak, and on the board before each man lay a mask and a long naked dagger. The hafts of the weapons were garnished with knots of ribbon, alternately bright blue and vivid green; but the badge on that which lay before the president was fashioned of both colours twisted together.

The small conclave assembled comprised men of widely various types, nationalities, and ages. The delicate features and classical beauty of the young Greek, Basil, were contrasted with the strong outlines and cruel, vulture eyes of his neighbour,

Fulcaris the Herulian; the eager glance of Maurice; the swarthy Armenian, with the stolid serenity of Buccelin, the fair-haired Goth; the smooth face and gigantic limbs of Rufin of Antioch, with the grizzled beard and spider-like frame of Leo the Byzantine. But one characteristic they all possessed in common. In the face and bearing of every man present might be detected the same conscious audacity and self-reliance. It was variously expressed; in one by a touch of half-defiant swagger, in another by an air of quiet resolution, in a third by a salient energy of mien, but in all alike it was noticeable. Prominent in even such a company, not only by his central position as president, but also by his stalwart form and bold presence, was Giton the Cretan, charioteer to the Blue Faction, who will also be remembered as the leader of the party which, in the last chapter, arrived so opportunely to the assistance of Baro and Belitzar.

It was late, and the council, which had commenced its sitting shortly after dusk, had almost got through the business on hand.

“The report of each brother,” said Giton, “is again satisfactory. Our great cause progresses, and the rising of the sun cannot long be delayed. Let us who have the privilege of a seat in this lodge watch hopefully for the breaking dawn, never forgetting how disastrous may be the consequences

of a single act of negligence or indiscretion. Fools and cowards may be disheartened by the thought of failure, but it stimulates brave men to insure success. Our brother Leo seems to consider that the late victories of Vitalian may disconcert our plans. I cannot agree with him. The chance that the Goth will ever be able to enter the city and seize the purple seems to me too remote to be worth consideration; but the people have learnt from his successes that their government is as weak as it is tyrannical and intolerant, and they desire a radical change. That is in our favour. The present sedition may, or may not, end in the deposition of Cæsar, to say no worse. We shall know more about that this time to-morrow. Anastasius may remain stubborn and lose his throne, or he may yield in time and save it. In the first case—the one which we earnestly desire—our course is simple: we give the lead, all the city follows it, and the elevation of the Dacians, uncle or nephew, is secured; in the second, we bide our time. If Anastasius live for another year, he will retract all concessions he may be forced into making as certainly as I, Giton, am now addressing you; if he die, we can at least deal summarily with Count Hypatius, supposing him to survive his captivity and to reappear as a candidate for the purple. In either case the ground is cut away from beneath Vitalian's feet—his rebellion must

collapse when the object of it no longer exists. Let the hour of action arrive when it may, soon or late, to-morrow or next year, we are prepared. On the staunch co-operation of our less privileged but not less trustworthy brethren, the Sons of the Sanctuary, we may confidently rely. In the mean time let it be our care to strengthen the bonds of Inner and Outer Brotherhood, to consolidate our mutual interests, to avoid internal dissension, and to prove ourselves worthy of the implicit confidence reposed in us."

A low murmur of applause ran round the table. If Leo or any other member demurred in their hearts to the somewhat dogmatic arguments of the president, they were wise enough to recognize the value of his remark about internal dissension, and held their peace.

"Before we separate," continued Giton, "and repair to our several posts there is one point to be considered. A year has all but elapsed since the death of Acacius the Cyprian, late Master of the bears to the Green Faction, by which our number in the lodge was rendered incomplete. It is scarcely doubtful that he died without exercising his right of appointing a substitute and successor. Does any one know aught to the contrary?" There being no reply, Giton resumed, "It is my opinion that it were wise to leave the vacant chair unfilled for the present. The critical state of public affairs

at this moment must render the election of a new member, strange to the working of our society, a hazardous step. But the question must be decided by vote. Let those who are of my mind signify their agreement." And, taking up the dagger before him, he drove the point into the table, leaving the hilt standing upright.

After a discussion of some minutes, it was discovered that only three members had followed the example of the president.

"Eleven against four," said Giton. "It is unnecessary to take the vote of the outer guard. Let those who have candidates to propose state their names and qualifications."

Here five points were at once driven into the table.

"Maurice the Armenian," said Giton, indicating the owner of the dagger nearest on the left, "your nomination?"

"Marcian of Ravenna," answered Maurice.

"A right good one!" exclaimed the president; "a man well known to all of us, and the best we are likely to find. It is hardly needful to demand his qualification, but as a matter of form state the one or more on which you rely."

"His escape from prison after braining the jailor, when, at the risk of his life, he remained in the city until he had fired the house of the man who betrayed him."

“Basil, your nomination ?” said Giton, passing on to the young Greek.

“Lysias, of the Green Faction,” replied Basil.

But the name of Marcia’s husband was evidently unpopular. The president shook his head, and all the brethren manifested various signs of disapprobation. The Greek was somewhat discontented by this unmistakable expression of dislike to his nominee.

“Your man will scarcely pass, Basil,” said Giton. “What qualification can you possibly vouch for on his behalf ?”

“He has tamed his wife,” replied Basil, trying to cover his discomfiture by a jest.

“Your humour is inopportune,” said Giton, severely. “The next. Leo, your nomination ?”

“Barsumas the eunuch,” answered Leo.

But before the merits of our old acquaintance could be discussed, three sharp knocks in quick succession at the door interrupted the proceedings.

“An alarm !” exclaimed Giton. “Cloak, mask, and steel !” And in a moment every man rose to his feet, shrouded himself from head to foot, and caught up his dagger from the board. “Rufin and Lothair, strengthen the outer guard,” went on the president. “Fulcaris and Buccelin, stand by the trap-door ! Maurice, make the report !”

Quick as thought, but without flurry or confusion, each member performed the part assigned to him.

Maurice, who had quitted the lodge, presently returned. "A single man," he reported, "claiming admission."

"On what grounds?" asked Giton.

"As the representative of Acacius the Cyprian."

"Where is he now?"

"In the custody of the outer guard. He has given the first password correctly."

"Good. Let him be brought in blindfolded and shrouded. Prepare the gag and the cord. Obscure the sun."

A black veil, fashioned to represent a cloud, was drawn over the illuminated device, and before long the figure of the new-comer, discernible only by the moonlight which filtered in from above, was seen standing in the chamber between his conductors, and the door was reclosed and barred.

"Whoever you may be," said Giton, breaking the dead silence in solemn tones, "who have ventured to intrude yourself upon this secret assembly, you have acted of your own free-will, and the consequences must rest on your own head. It is too late to draw back. You have shown that you know too much not to compel us to demand more. If your assertion be true that you come as the representative of our dead brother Acacius, he will or ought to have provided you with the means of proving it, to the extent which his oath permitted. If your answers are satisfactory,

you are among friends ; you will be called upon in due time to declare yourself, and be admitted to the membership and privileges of this society. But if you have obtained the information you possess of this our place of meeting and our password from accidental and irregular sources, if you have ventured hither through mere hardihood or curiosity, you are lost. If our dead brother neglected to supply you with all the requisite proofs, or you have rashly neglected to study them with sufficient care, such negligence will be fatal ; hard though the case may be, the merest suspicion will be against you—you are lost. Be assured that we shall not even trouble ourselves to identify you ; unknown as you stand there you shall die, and in the same shroud which now envelopes it your body must lie beneath the waters of the Bosphorus. Summon, therefore, all your resolution and presence of mind, qualities which are essential in a member of this lodge ; and unless you possess them in a high degree, our dead brother did grievous wrong in appointing you as his successor."

"I am ready," replied the stranger, in a deep, firm voice. "Prove me."

"Let him approach," said Giton to the attendants, by whom the candidate was led forward and stationed in the centre of the lodge immediately under the skylight.

"You state," continued the president, "that you present yourself in the place of Acacius the Cyprian. What is the first proof you offer?"

"A sign."

"Give that sign."

The stranger raised his right hand above his head, and against the white screen of the skylight it could be seen that the palm was open and the fingers extended.

"Of what is that sign a symbol?"

"Of the rays of the rising sun."

"With what is it connected?"

"With a word."

"Give that word."

"'Iztok.'"

"The meaning of it?"

"It also signifies the rising sun."

"What further proof do you offer?"

"A twofold sign."

"Give the first part."

The open hand was again raised, this time to the forehead, the thumb was placed on the right temple, and the fingers drawn slowly across the bows to meet it.

"The second part."

The span of the thumb and finger rested for an instant on the eyeballs, and the tips were then united on the mouth.

"The meaning of the signs."

“ I know only that they refer to the punishment inflicted on treachery.”

“ The next proof.”

“ A word with a double meaning.”

“ Give the word.”

“ ‘ Opraouda.’ ”

“ The double meaning.”

“ Upright and justice.”

“ To what does it refer ? ”

“ To the first beam of the sunrise, and to the just doom inflicted on the traitor.”

“ Has it any further significance ? ”

“ It has reference to the names of those whose interests this lodge is pledged to advance—the Dacians, Justin and Justinian.”

“ In what other way can it be symbolized ? ”

“ By a dagger fixed upright upon its point.”

“ In which quarter does the sun rise for us ? ”

“ From the blue mountains of the north.”

“ Where does it attain its greatest glory ? ”

“ In the infinite blue of heaven.”

“ And where its dying splendour ? ”

“ Amid the blue waters of the sea.”

“ How many colours do we recognize ? ”

“ Four. Green, red, blue, and white.”

“ To what do they refer ? ”

“ To the four seasons.”

“ How so ? ”

“ To the verdure of spring, the red flame of the

dogstar, the deep shadows of autumn, and the snows of winter."

"Have you a preference for any one colour?"

"Ostensibly in the outer world, but in my heart and within this lodge for none."

"For what reason?"

"As also seasons are alike subordinate to the sun, so all colours combine to form the perfect ray."

"When will you declare a preference, and for which?"

"When the sun rises; and for that from which he springs, amidst which he must shine in splendour, and in which he must gloriously set."

"If the brethren are satisfied," said Giton, addressing the lodge, "let them signify their approval by the dagger."

But after a whispered consultation the reply was given by a single stern voice.

"The brethren are not satisfied."

"What more do they demand?"

"They demand that he who has intruded himself on this secret assembly be prepared for instant death."

"Is that the unanimous judgment of this lodge?"

The responsive stroke of the daggers was immediate.

"So be it," assented the president; "let him be prepared for death."

The stranger was at once seized by four of the brethren and forced upon his knees; his hands and feet were bound, the loop of a cord passed round his throat so tightly as only not to hinder respiration, and the point of a dagger was pressed painfully against his naked breast.

“Your proofs and your answers,” said Giton, “have failed to satisfy the brethren. Into the nature of their suspicions I am not bound to inquire, as I have before warned you it is sufficient that they suspect. The partial information you possess may bear the stamp of having been obtained by accident, treachery, or other irregular means. But you have still one chance for life. If with his own lips Acacius appointed you his successor, he will have communicated to you orally a secret which may not be communicated in any other way. I am about to strike nine blows on this table with my dagger; eight will be with the hilt, the ninth with the point. The last will be the signal for your instantaneous death; the cord round your neck will be drawn tight, the blade at your breast driven home. If before the ninth blow falls the assembled brethren hear from your own lips that secret which you are bound to have heard from the lips of Acacius, they will be satisfied that you are here of right; but if during the delivery of the blows you utter one single word except to reveal the secret, that word will be your

last articulate utterance upon earth. Let the brethren approach and listen!

The stillness which ensued was that of an empty room, and then came the dull sound of the dagger hilt striking at regular intervals. At the fourth blow Giton spoke again with something in his tone of merciful appeal. "What is the will of the brethren?"

"Let him speak or die!" was the pitiless response.

The blows continued to fall; the sixth, the seventh, the eighth. The president raised his hand for the last time and slowly reversed the dagger. The kneeling figure remained mute and motionless as an image of stone. There was a slight stir as the assistants tightened their grasp upon the fatal cord, and the poised blade descended. But the point never struck the wood.

"Hold!" thundered Giton; "relax the cord, and let the brethren fall back! I call upon you now to answer," continued the president; "you may do so with safety. Are you in possession of the secret we demand?"

"I am."

"Why have you withheld it at so perilous a moment?"

"Because under no circumstances whatever may it be uttered aloud."

"Right. You will now communicate it to me by

whisper ; " and stooping, he laid his ear against the candidate's lips. " With the consent of the lodge," said Giton, resuming his seat, " I pronounce the proofs complete and without flaw."

The daggers of the brethren rose and fell three times in rapid succession.

" By that triple salute," said the president to the still kneeling candidate, " we hail you as our new brother, the properly constituted successor of Acacius the Cyprian. The nerve and resolution you have manifested under the last trying ordeal attest the wisdom of his choice. Your safety is assured, and I adjure you to reply frankly to the questions I must still ask."

" Beyond your desire to promote the designs of this lodge, what motive have you in joining it ? "

" The strongest ; the desire to advance myself."

" To which Faction do you nominally adhere ?

" To the Green."

" To what faith or creed ? "

" I have professed Christianity."

" But in your heart ? "

" To none."

" In what do you believe ? "

" In the stars, destiny, and myself."

" What do you hold most sacred ? "

" I ignore any such sentiment."

" Do you recognize the value of an oath ? "

" I hold that the value depends upon the consequences entailed by a breach of it."

“ You disregard the moral obligation ? ”

“ Altogether.”

“ Do you value the opinion of the world ? ”

“ Only so far as it affects personal success.”

“ Your courage and resolution we do not doubt.

Can you mention any act or enterprise of your life which proves you to possess the qualities we value in our comrades—daring, unscrupulousness, and contempt of conventional principle ? ”

“ I believe so.”

“ In the act or enterprise you select were you alone, or associated with others ? ”

“ I was the leader and director of others.”

“ To your knowledge, of any members of this lodge ? ”

“ To the best of my belief, of one at least.”

“ Your object in the enterprise ? ”

“ Gain.”

“ And the nature of it ? ”

“ The abduction of the Patriarch Macedonius.”

“ Restore light to the lodge,” exclaimed Giton, “ and let our new brother be freed from his bonds ! John of Cappadocia, welcome heartily to the Brotherhood of the Rising Sun ! As president of this lodge, I take upon myself to say that, one and all, we congratulate ourselves upon your accession to our ranks. You and I have met elsewhere ; something of your past career I know, something I can guess. But few amongst us,

either within or without this lodge, have any permanent connection with that higher sphere of society in which you, by boldness and ability, have secured a footing. We are no parasites of the great; we belong to no master—that which we do we do for our own hand; but we recognize the truth that, if time permit, a judicious use of such high connection may greatly benefit our cause. At the right moment, indeed, the fact of our secret co-operation might well be imparted to those whom it most concerns. And for this important and delicate service none can be more fitted than yourself. I say, if time permit, because the consummation of our schemes may arrive twelve hours hence—it may not have arrived twelve months hence. But if delay be inevitable, it may, at least, be utilized.

“ Your frank avowal that in joining us you are influenced by a strong desire to advance yourself, is also satisfactory. We seek to enlist in our cause men who have strong interests in its success; for the nature of those interests we care little, let them be only strong, and conducive to the one great end. We count amongst us men who are actuated by motives purely patriotic, like Leo yonder; purely venal, like Fulcaris; by party spirit, like Maurice; by a mixture of all three, like myself; by ambition, like you. In labouring simultaneously for our great cause we are also labouring separately for

that which each most earnestly desires, and in the single aim and manifold selfishness lies our strength.

“ I applaud also the candour with which you refused to acknowledge the moral obligation of an oath. Such sentiments prove your sincerity, since it was open to you to conceal them. But for the satisfaction of the brethren, whose views on this point are various, and in accordance with our strict rule, the same oath will be administered to you which has been administered to every member of this society, and I warn you solemnly to live in dread of the human penalty entailed by a breach of it, if of nothing else. As we can rescue the staunch comrade even on the place of execution, so can we reach the traitor even in Cæsar’s palace.

“ Maurice and Lothair, let the secret of the trap-door be revealed to our new brother, John of Cappadocia.”

The two mentioned passed from their seats at the end of the chamber to the centre of the side wall. There, by pressing at the same time upon a certain spot in the flooring and upon another in the wainscot, a portion of the latter revolved upwards on a noiseless hinge, and disclosed a considerable aperture.

“ From that trap-door,” continued Giton, “ you can descend by a flight of steps to the foundation

of this building. At the bottom is a subterranean passage which at some distance divides into two branches: their junction is impenetrably concealed, and upon the wall hard by are engraved certain characters containing the secret which may not be uttered aloud, and which I shall privately explain to you. The one branch terminates in a cell in the monastery of St. Conon, where certain of the holy brethren, who are pledged as a body to support our cause, are now keeping watch. By means of this cord I have intimated that the attendance of one of them is required in the lodge. The other branch leads to an exit contrived beneath the piles at the water's edge, opposite the Chalcedonian Stairs. The secret of the latter is known to one man in five and twenty among the Outer Brotherhood, or Sons of the Sanctuary, and by this means the safety of any brother who is threatened with loss of liberty or life can, under certain circumstances and with certain restrictions, be secured. The secret of the other branch is known only to the members of this lodge and the sworn confederates of the holy league of St. Conon."

As Giton ceased speaking a slight noise was heard below the trap-door, from which presently emerged the head and shoulders of a monk, who drew himself up into the chamber, and remained silent and stationary.

"John of Cappadocia," said the president,

“kneel, while the holy father administers the customary oath.”

The monk produced from beneath his robe a silver casket. “Within this,” he said, “is contained the embalmed heart of the holy martyr St. Conon; and with your hand upon this most sacred relic you will repeat the oath after me.

“I, John Secundus, native of Mazaca, commonly called and known as John of Cappadocia, here in the presence of God and this lodge, and on the heart of the holy St. Conon, do solemnly swear that by no means whatsoever, direct or indirect, by word, writing, or otherwise, will I ever divulge any part or portion of anything which has been already or may hereafter be communicated to me, which I have learnt or may learn, respecting the signs, tokens, passwords, secrets, privileges, constitution, place of meeting and existence of the Brotherhood of the Rising Sun, saving by consent and command of the president and brethren assembled in lodge, and then only with extreme caution, and to such extent as may advance the cause and interests of the Brotherhood. Saving also that I reserve to myself the right of using upon emergency the signs, tokens, and passwords which are common to ourselves and the Sons of the Sanctuary, and in the prospect of death of communicating to him whom I shall deem fit so much as may enable him to present himself safely as my representative and

successor. And I further solemnly swear that, holding all other ties and interests, private and public, as subordinate to the great end of this society, I will staunchly, boldly, and unscrupulously, to the utmost of my power, strive to advance that great end, namely, the elevation to the throne of the Eastern Empire of the Dacians, Justin and Justinian, and their descendants, and collaterally the establishment of the Blue Faction in permanent superiority. I swear to obey the joint commands and instructions of the president and the brethren in all that relates to the designs of this Brotherhood, and never to abuse the rights of membership by availing myself of its secret power and privileges in any way which may be detrimental to such designs. And if I fail in observing to the letter this my solemn oath, I acknowledge that I shall be justly punished by having my brows encircled by a band of steel, my eyes and lips sewn up, and by being in that state impaled upon an upright stake, in a cell prepared for the purpose beneath the foundations of this building. And in default of human vengeance, I invoke upon myself the most terrible visitations of Divine wrath, both in this world and the next: the tremor of Cain, the leprosy of Gehazi, the corruption of Herod, and the end of Judas; a miserable life, an agonizing death, and eternal torment.'"

At the close of these tremendous words, the

daggers of the brethren fell once again in unison with the deep "Amen" of the monk.

"Your arm," said the president, "will now be punctured by the point of a dagger, and with the drop of blood thus obtained you will sign the written oath, as a token that, together with the benefits of association, you accept the consequences of complicity. The document remains in the custody of the holy brethren of St. Conon."

When this ceremony was completed, and the Cappadocian had added his ruddy signature to the roll of the conspirators, the monk retired through the trap-door, which was closed behind him, leaving the wall, even to the most careful scrutiny, apparently solid and without flaw.

"For the moment," said Giton, "I have little to add. It is, I trust, clear to you, that as long as you are zealous in advancing our cause you may command the services of the Brotherhood for any private scheme fairly feasible, and not inconsistent with your oath. The brethren have a corresponding claim upon you; but we are not unreasonable. We regard the exigencies of position, education, and natural gifts. We admit that some are fitted to plan, others to execute; some to lead, others to follow. We do not expect from the cunning brain the work of the strong hand, or force the dagger into fingers more acquainted with the pen.

"Our passwords, 'Opraouda' and 'Iztok,' are the names of Justinian and his father, Sabatius, as rendered in the Slavonic dialect. The cry of 'Upright, upright!' and the use of the first sign, the open palm raised above the head, will almost infallibly procure you ready and strong assistance, if need be, in any place where men are congregated. Although the existence, as a body, of the Sons of the Sanctuary is generally known, their organization and strength are still mysteries to the outer world.

"The right of sanctuary is available not only for members of the Inner and Outer Brotherhood, but may be extended upon occasion to others whom, as being in dire peril and necessity, they may recommend to the temporary protection of the lodge. But it is expected that this right will be exercised but seldom, and, indeed, only in cases of extreme emergency. I shall disclose to you privately, at the earliest opportunity, the secrets of the subterranean passage and the unutterable words ; at present it is enough to say that they date from the time of old Byzantium, centuries before the foundation of this city by the Emperor Constantine. You now stand here a regularly constituted and accepted brother of the Lodge of the Rising Sun, in full possession of its benefits and privileges. If before we separate you have any statement or proposition to make, speak."

“I claim,” said the Cappadocian, “the right of sanctuary.”

“For yourself,” asked the president, “or for another?”

“For another, in dire peril and necessity.”

“Are you willing to name the person, and to show that your claim is in no way adverse to the interests of the Brotherhood?”

“At first sight it may appear to be so, but if you will grant me a patient hearing, I hope to convince you that it is, on the contrary, advantageous.”

“A patient and friendly hearing every brother is entitled to, and you shall have. John of Cappadocia, for whom do you claim the benefit of sanctuary?”

“For Anastasius Cæsar, Emperor of the East.”

An irrepressible exclamation of astonishment burst from the president and the whole lodge.

“Your claim,” said Giton, after some moments’ reflection, “is as daring as it is unexpected. Coming from most men it would appear an extravagant idea, to be condemned almost without thought, as equally absurd and injurious. You ask us in a manner to forego the golden opportunity for which we have so long been labouring. But as I cannot believe that a man of your notorious sagacity and far-sightedness would advance so startling a proposition upon insufficient grounds, I, at least, engage to listen dispassionately to any arguments

you may be able to adduce in its favour, and in my office of president I call upon the lodge to do the same. What say the brethren?"

The decision of the majority was in favour of a patient and impartial hearing; but one or two voices were heard to exclaim, "The claim is traitorous; it is inconsistent with the oath."

"The boldness of the claim in open lodge," said Giton, "at once negatives the charge of treachery. Of its inconsistency with the oath we shall be better able to judge when our brother has spoken. John of Cappadocia, support your claim to sanctuary in favour of Anastasius Cæsar."

"President and brethren of the Lodge of the Rising Sun," began the Cappadocian in his deep, deliberate tones, "I can readily understand that you conceive the death or deposition of Anastasius to be, under any circumstances, a golden opportunity for the elevation of Justin or Justinian, to the final exclusion of all other candidates for the purple. The conception is natural, and at the first glance appears difficult to gainsay. Count Hypatius is prisoner in a Scythian fortress, his brother Pompey is in the field. Superficially regarded, all things tend to encourage the conclusion—a conclusion born of earnest desire—that your hour of triumph is at hand. But I believe, notwithstanding, that by a careful analysis of the present condition of affairs you will be convinced that such a conclusion is strained and premature.



“ In analyzing the nature of the political crisis we have to calculate the relative value and operation of three great intramural forces, the army, the clergy, and the Factions; forces familiar enough, as a rule distinct and well defined, and by no means difficult to estimate ; but now, under peculiar circumstances, so transformed and modified, so crossed and intermingled, that any calculation based upon their normal condition must infallibly mislead us. In addition to these, there is a fourth, an external force, the importance of which I entreat you not for one instant to underrate—the army of Vitalian the Goth.

“ Let us consider the changes developed during the last ten days. We are accustomed to regard the Factions as two bodies eminently antagonistic, capable, from a political point of view, of being played against each other, and of being thereby to a certain extent severally neutralized. Through their recent coalition we are now confronted by a novel factor of immense if of indefinite strength. The influence of the clergy, great as it confessedly is, has hitherto been recognized as almost purely spiritual ; we see it suddenly complemented by a vast accession of temporal power in the form of thirty thousand fanatical monks, ready to die to a man, if need be, in defence of their opinions. The army, on the contrary—or I should rather say the Imperial Guard, for the bulk of the regular forces is

without the fortifications—the Guard, then, whose province is essentially executive, the bulwark and the patron of the throne, arrogating to itself the scales of empire, the despot of despotism and the tyrant of tyranny, has renounced its traditional functions. That Guard we view with amazement tamely yielding to the unwonted and anomalous pressure of the two great forces I have named, piling its arms and ensigns in the Forum of Constantine, and standing aloof from the struggle with the inert indifference of unwarlike citizens. But all this, it may be argued, tends towards the same end. The coalition of the Factions, the demonstration of the monks, the apathy of the Guard, are all constituents of one gigantic scheme to overthrow the present government. Granted that it be so; let us clearly understand that so it is; let us realize fully that this combination aims at the deposition of a reigning Emperor, not at the elevation of a new one. It is easy to be unanimous in demolition, in reconstruction it is next to impossible. When the image is overturned the iconoclasts will quarrel over the vacant pedestal. As long as Anastasius continues to be Cæsar, if only in name, so long will the vast complex league endure, and no longer; and how many aspirants to the purple, think you, will start up within twelve hours of Cæsar's fall? The Greens, in the absence of Hypatius, will put

forward one of their own colour, not improbably Marinus; from the palace we have warning to beware of some bold stroke from Amantius, the Chamberlain; the red-hot zeal of the ecclesiastics hails Vitalian as the heaven-sent guardian of the Catholic faith; a large section of the populace are shouting for Areobindus; the guards will sell their influence to the highest bidder. To the Blues alone, a weakened and discouraged Faction, can we look for a modicum of staunch support. And then, amid the rage of conflicting storms, when our bark of enterprise is tossing at the mercy of the turbulent waves, when the city is more fiercely convulsed by dissension than it now is by sedition, when every man's hand is against his neighbour, then will be the opportunity of Vitalian. Let us not blind ourselves to the truth. It is only by concentrating all our energies and resources that his advance can now be checked; if he gain one more victory it will be too late. I am no vain alarmist in anticipating that if Anastasius be deposed, the mass of our demoralized troops will desert their standards, and re-enter the city in the train of the invader whom they went forth to oppose.

“ It may appear strange and possibly displeasing to the brethren that, in enumerating the active forces which rule the present crisis, I have omitted all mention of the Brotherhood of the Rising Sun. But I appeal boldly to the candour and good sense

of the lodge. Have we—I speak as a brother to brethren—have we as yet the undoubted power of controlling to our own ends the workings of the political earthquake? If our power be not beyond a doubt, to undertake the task is madness. Can we outbid the offers of Amantius and secure the suffrage of the guards? Can we sway to our purpose the fanatic legions of the monks? Can we withstand the unreasoning fury of the Greens? Let it be granted that by desperate efforts we might in the end succeed, do we desire our day of promise to break gloomy with storm-charged clouds and lurid with angry fires? Let us, like men wise and valiant enough to be patient, bide our time; let us save Cæsar; in concealment he will still be an Emperor, in safety he will be none the less a fugitive; then assuredly he will offer those concessions which the mob, howling round the palace gates, cannot extort; the city will be pacified, the monks will disperse, the guards will resume their arms, and by an inevitable reaction of loyalty all parties will unite for the one object of checking the advance of Vitalian. To attain that point alone is worth the sacrifice of all immediate hopes; but be certain that a monarch who has been forced to fly his throne, and a prince who has undergone an ignominious captivity, are no sure foundation on which a dynasty may be established. We, brethren,

by untiring resolution, craft, and watchfulness, will lay a surer; our secret influence shall permeate all ranks of society and prepare them for our future deeds; men shall learn to see with our eyes, hope with our hopes, and strike with our weapons; so may we confidently await that bright, unclouded dawn, when the beams of our sun shall gloriously burst into the tranquil azure, diffusing life and joy and splendour to the exulting universe!"

The effect of this speech was not for one instant doubtful. As the Cappadocian concluded, and stood with his hand raised to the glowing symbol of the lodge, dagger after dagger was driven deep into the board, and then the president, completing the semicircle of upright hilts, proclaimed aloud—

"In the name of the Rising Sun, and in accordance with the claim of our brother, John of Cappadocia, I pronounce that the protection of this lodge is extended to Anastasius Cæsar, Emperor of the East."

* * * * *

"A good but fatiguing night's work," murmured John, as he turned wearily into bed. "Oh, the assumption, self-delusion, and gullibility of men! But petty conspiracies have their use. It will be strange if I cannot make at least as much by hiding an Emperor as by carrying off a Patriarch. The

next thing is to get the obstinate old bigot out of his palace prison. I hope the mob won't save me the trouble and settle the matter their own way. In any case, I require sleep ; " and dismissing with a yawn all thoughts of intrigue, John dropped quietly off.

CHAPTER V.

THE CHALCEDONIAN STAIRS.

THE greater part of the succeeding twenty-four hours was spent by Belitzar in repressing with difficulty the spirit which moved him to rush into the city and take a personal part, however small, in the extraordinary drama which was being acted within its walls. But the friendly counsels of his hosts, and a natural sense of strangeness and isolation, deterred him, and he remained ingloriously safe outside. His young ideas of Imperial greatness were receiving terrible shocks. Nurtured as he had been, under the loyal tuition of his father, in the belief that an Emperor was a kind of infallible, omnipotent being existing in a golden atmosphere of semi-divinity, approachable only with fear and trembling, and hardly to be alluded to without the reverential awe which attaches to things sacred, the present state of affairs was to him incomprehensible. Of heresies he knew but little, and his uncompromising loyalty

made no allowance for sectarian zeal ; he had been taught to regard the rebellion of Vitalian as one of those desperately wicked enterprises—all the more wicked for its assumption of religious motives—which Providence occasionally suffers for its own wise purposes, but of which man is bound only to see the iniquity. Over-night he had been astounded and disgusted at the tone of Demas, who spoke of the Lord of the East as coolly and unceremoniously as of the most commonplace ordinary mortal, and of his troubles and their possible event with not more concern than he might have betrayed in discussing the chances of a chariot race. The more he thought it over the more astounding it appeared.

He had gone out shortly after daybreak, but he found Demas astir before him, in conversation with a suspicious-looking individual who presently retired, and from the charioteer he learnt the events of the night. The Emperor had refused to parley with the rioters, the mob was becoming hourly more enraged, the palace was surrounded by the Factions, and the standards and arms of the guards were deposited in the Forum of Constantine, together with the keys of the city, which the civil authorities had been compelled to resign.

Horrified and sickened he turned away, and beheld the glories of Constantinople. Immediately in front of him, and sweeping far away over rise

and level along the curves of the Golden Horn, their grand outline broken at intervals by mighty towers, rose the Great Walls of Theodosius ; now impending so closely over the water, that every line and block of the massive masonry was repeated in the placid blue beneath ; now receding to afford room for spacious wharves, giant warehouses, inner docks and basins bristling with masts, from which by many a gate the products of a universe were poured into the city of Constantine ; and behind them, tier over tier, slope beyond slope, a glorious confusion of palaces, churches, domes, and towers, of arches, obelisks, pinnacles, and statues, standing out radiant and glittering in the pure morning light. Constantinople ! Queen of the Orient ! enthroned upon her seven hills more luxuriously if less proudly than Rome herself, and decked with the splendid regalia of art which her founder had ransacked the world to bestow upon her, and for two centuries his successors had laboured to render more magnificent.

And the master of all this—the Imperial Lord of the Empress of the seas, of her grandeur and opulence—what and were was he ? A prisoner !—a prisoner within those stately walls which towered yonder amid their gardens and terraces ; a captive within his own palace, with his own subjects for gaolers. The hand of every man was against him, within and without the city ; Goth, Hun, and

Bulgarian, priests, people, soldiers, and Factions, all making common cause, all leagued in the commission of a monstrous incredible sacrilege. And with it all things outwardly went on much as usual. Was the age of portents altogether past? Was it no longer to be expected that thunder would peal out of the serene blue of heaven, proclaiming the Divine indignation at man's presumption, or an earthquake rock the fair city to her foundations and bid the earth gape to engulf treason and impiety?

Around him the harbour was awakening to the routine of daily life; so inseparably one, so prosaically discordant with the greater interests at stake. The lesser mechanism of the huge social engine was in motion in all its complex littleness and insignificant importance. The daily work was to be done, the daily bread to be earned; turbulent or tranquil, submissive or rebellious, Constantinople must eat, drink, and be clothed—more, be regaled and pampered—her thousand wants, lusts, and cravings satisfied. The heathen might rage, and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord's anointed; what were their flutter and babble beside the imperious apathy of the two insatiate idols, Necessity and Luxury, who sat by with folded hands waiting to be ministered unto?

What if the people had grown weary of the image they had set up, and longed to cast it down

and break it? To-morrow they would find another to fill the vacant pedestal—of pure gold it might be; if not, of brass, stone, or clay, whatever came to hand—and gild it and overlay it until none should know the difference, and bow down before it, worship and call upon it. But in the mean time Davus must not lack his noon tide meal of bread and onions and a stoup of rough wine, nor Tita her gay kerchief wherewith to appear at the next festival; not one dainty must be wanting to the patrician board of Varus, nor one rare blossom to the garland on Callista's hair.

Alas! for the fair dreams among the hills of Thrace—of a mighty prince, to be at once venerated and loved; awful and infallible in his majesty and wisdom, lovable in his condescension and beneficence; his identity not merged in the blaze and glare of sovereignty, but standing out the clearer and stronger amid the glory which surrounded him, which emanated from himself; whose existence meant light to the world, whose death darkness. And to be the servant of such a master, to live devoted to him, to die for him a thousand deaths! And now, were truth and loyalty and devotion mere phantoms? Anastasius or Vitalian? Roman, Goth, or Greek? What did it matter? To those traitorous guards, say, whose accoutrements glittered idly in the Forum of Constantine, when they should have been gathered, despite of monks,

Factions, and rebels, about their liege lord, to perish to a man, if need be, in his defence—to those stalwart fishermen, who, chattering, singing, and laughing, were thronging out of the cottages which clustered under the wall to prepare their nets and shake out their sails—to those busy groups which began to collect before the warehouses and among the merchandise piled along quays—to the piles of slaves and porters who hurried like ants in and out of the gates, or toiled under their burdens up the long stairs leading into the city—to the owners of the craft which glided in one after the other before the gentle air from the Propontis, laden with fish for the market at the Porta Piscaria, with fruit and vegetables for the Porta Fructuaria, with wood and wheat for the Lignaria and Farinaria, with all the requirements of that grandly organized emporium; or to old Baro, who came out to disturb the young man's reveries, and to prose for an hour over the details and technicalities of the business he conducted?

It was a flourishing concern in its way. Besides farming the large ferry-boat which ran three times a day to Chalcedon and back, and two smaller ones which plied between the stairs and the suburb of Sycæ immediately opposite, Baro was master of half a dozen of the craft employed in the tunny fishery, and owned, in addition, a small fleet for the convenience and pleasure of the inhabitants

of Constantinople. There were boats of all shapes and sizes, with and without sails; many-oared barges, adapted for pilgrimages and picnics to Euphemia or the Giant's Grave, gorgeous with paint and gilding, and supplied with awnings and curtains to screen the cheeks of the fair Byzantines from the scorching glances of the sun, or on occasion from those of impudent curiosity; racing boats, long and slender, for the regattas; light skiffs for couples who desired only each other's society; and trim cedar caciques, in which during the cool of the evening the athletic youths of the city might exhibit, single-handed, their fair proportions and aquatic skill to the promenaders on the ramparts.

There was a great deal to be impressed on Belitzar's uneducated mind:—which boat and crew were specially suitable to the somewhat unreasonable requirements of the fair aristocrats, which to those of the elderly citizen and his family, to whom speed and elegance were less an object than undeniable safety;—how to make Chalcedon it was necessary to bear up nearly to Chrysopolis, how best to utilize the perplexing phases of the double current and the steady breeze which, regular as the sun itself, came sweeping through the straits every day at noontide:—how certain carpets, awnings, and other fittings were too costly to be used on ordinary occasions, and how, during Baro's absence, all the

establishment had conspired to ruin him by carelessness ;—how important it was to see every boat properly secured at night upon the chain which ran along the raft ; for, not long back, had not certain rascals absconded with a brand-new wherry, and had never been heard of since ? And much more of the same kind, until Belitzar was thoroughly bored and confused, and thoroughly thankful when Antonina, looking fresh and lovely as the morning, came out to summon them to breakfast. But during the meal his patience was again sorely tried by the conversation of Demas, to whom word had come that one of the thoroughbreds which he expected to pilot at the next Circensian games had strained himself at exercise, and he must forthwith take boat and run up the Golden Horn to the training establishment ; and would Belitzar care to accompany him, inspect the stables, stay over the night well out of harm's way, and witness the morning gallop, a privilege which many a sporting young aristocrat would be glad to pay for heavily ? But the Thracian excused himself upon the ground of entering at once upon his new duties, although Baro was willing to allow him a couple of days' grace before commencing ; and so relieved his injured feelings by physical exertion, and put to shame the measured indolence of the regular oarsmen by the way in which he laid himself down to the work.

Later on, when the noonday quiet had fallen upon the harbour, and the incessant hum of the surging city, at times deepening to a muffled roar, came out clearer over the wall, arrived a swaggering lackey with an order for a six-oared wherry, to convey his Egregiousness Malchus to his villa on the opposite shore below Sycæ; and shortly after a train of slaves, bearing various packages and four litters, which disgorged upon the raft a stout, red-faced old man, his pretty young wife, a favourite maid, two poodles, a blue monkey, a parrot, and a curled and scented exquisite, who appeared to the eyes of Belitzar a compound of the last three. While the husband and wife embarked, he remained on shore and made his adieux.

“Farewell, noble Malchus; sweet lady, farewell, until happier times restore you to our longing eyes. I mourn, but must applaud your resolution. To-morrow many will doubtless follow your example, and escape from these annoying tumults. I would that my own duties and engagements would permit me also to peramatize,” he lisped, using the cant word of the day for crossing the strait; “but it may not be;” and then, as he bent over the dainty fingers presented to him, the quick ears of Belitzar caught the whisper, “My life!—to-morrow—after dusk—in the south pavilion;” and he re-entered his litter and was borne away, little guessing how the fingers of the young giant beside him itched

to take him by the neck and pitch him, curls, scent, finery, and all, headlong into the water.

And so the day wore on, until the shades of evening began to fall, and the Golden Horn once more subsided into tranquillity. Shout, hail, and whistle, the creak and groan of crane and pulley, the rattle of oars, the clang of hammer and axe in the dockyards of Sycæ, died gradually away. Only from the city still rose that hoarse, angry murmur which all day long had tortured the ears of Belitzar. Two hours after sunset the boats were made fast under the personal superintendence of the cautious Baro, the men dismissed, and the key solemnly entrusted to Belitzar, an extraordinary compliment and mark of confidence which the Thracian was hardly in a humour to appreciate as it deserved.

With the night came worse tidings from within the walls. It was no longer a question of Cæsar's humiliation or submission, but of his deposition and, possibly, death. All his statues were thrown down, the palace was besieged more closely than ever, and even the private entrance by the garden stairs was blockaded by armed boats to prevent escape in that direction.

And to all this Belitzar listened with a burning sense of shame and self-reproach, which might be extravagant, but was utterly incontrollable, and moreover registered a secret vow that, if matters

had not mended before the morning, come what might, he would enter the city, strike one good blow on behalf of his Emperor, and die for him, even as Phocas had died.

And with this resolution, and his thoughts wandering back to the old farm, he fell asleep and dreamed. And his visions, passing through many phases, at last carried him back to his hunter's life. Now he was once more couched in the forest, bow in hand, waiting for the deer to pass. He could hear the whisper of the leaves and the creaking of the boughs overhead and the light tread of the approaching quarry, and, drawing the arrow to its head, with the absurd inconsequence of a dream it lengthened out, and he was in his boat upon the mere, hauling in, hand over hand, a huge fish, which, at the very moment of capture, broke loose and vanished with a loud flap of its mighty tail, and, plunging forward after it, he awoke, to hear a little scream and find himself grasping somewhat roughly that which, although nearly as slender and supple, could hardly be the monster's tail, inasmuch as it was anything but cold and scaly, being neither more nor less than the waist of the pretty Antonina.

To account for the equivocal position in which Belitzar found himself on waking we must go back to some ten minutes before, when the moonlight revealed a man hurrying, at the risk of his neck,

three steps at a time, down the steep face of the Scala Chalcedonensis, followed, at a more deliberate pace, by several others, of whom the central figure, apparently old and feeble, was supported and half borne along by his companions on either side.

Arrived at the water's edge, the group halted in the shadow of the house, whilst the first comer stole round to the opposite side, and with gravel and chips of wood commenced making signals to a certain window overlooking the harbour. Perhaps it was not the first time he had done this; anyhow, before long his efforts were successful; the casement was opened, and a female head peeped cautiously out.

“Antonina?”

“Paris!”

“Come down at once and wake your father, without disturbing any one else.”

“Wake my father! Well—besides, I can't; he has gone to look after the horses, and won't be back until to-morrow. But Baro is at home, if he will do.”

“No, no; the maundering old fool will keep us all night.”

“What do you want?”

“A boat at once. Where is the key of the chain?”

“A boat—at this time of night! I dare say!”

“Antonina! I swear it is a matter of life and

death. Come down yourself, and I will tell you all. Be quick!"

Thus adjured the girl disappeared, and presently appeared on tiptoe out of the back door, and Paris rapidly explained the situation.

"Good heavens! you clever thing!" ejaculated Antonina, admiringly. "How did you get him out?"

"By the secret passage into the palace gardens, and over the wall by a ladder."

"And where is he going?"

"To Sycæ."

"To Sycæ? But where?"

"I have no idea. That is the secret of those who planned the escape. They pledge themselves for his perfect safety."

"Do you believe them?"

"We must; it is the only chance."

"Who is going with him?"

"John the Cappadocian and two others."

"Not you?"

"I dare not. I am on guard in the antechamber and must get back as soon as I can. Ecebolus is waiting by the ladder; he has behaved splendidly to-night."

"Well done, Adonis! But why didn't they have a boat ready?"

"They had, at the Scala Sycæna; but we met a patrol of the Factions and were forced to turn

back—only just in time. But for God's sake don't ask any more questions. Where is the key?"

"The Thracian has it."

"Who the devil is the Thracian?"

"A stranger whom Baro brought home with him?"

"What is to be done?"

"Wake him and get it."

"Can he be trusted?"

"If a face goes for anything he can be. He is only a boy, but he is as brave and strong and handsome as Achilles."

"Hum! Where does this paragon sleep?"

"In the other house. In the lower room there; the corner window."

"Then we must get the key at once; without wakening him, if possible. If not, and he makes himself disagreeable, why——" and he touched his sword-hilt significantly. "I will go with you."

"You will do nothing of the kind, sir. You step like an elephant, and your spurs make noise enough to wake the house. I will get a light and go alone. Wait by the door."

"Well, whatever you do, lose no time. Cæsar is half dead with fatigue. We had to hurry him along so. If they see us from the wall, all is lost. Luckily, the sentries have slipped off to join the mob. Every one does as he pleases to-night."

And this accounts for the delicate situation I have recorded above.

* * * * *

“Oh, how you hurt me!” said poor Antonina, writhing. “Do let go.”

Half awake and rather abashed, Belitzar could only ask, simply enough, what she wanted ?

“Where is the key of the boats ?”

“Under my pillow.”

“I thought so. I tried to get it without waking you, but I knocked something down. I am sure we can trust you. The Emperor has escaped and is here. Hush ! not a word. Only get up and come out as quickly as you can.”

We may judge if Belitzar lost any time. In five minutes more the boat was halfway across the harbour, and the Thracian found himself, as another boatman had been before him, the temporary guardian of Cæsar’s fortunes. Imperial greatness ! how it had dwindled away before his horror-stricken eyes, until at last it was shrivelled to this :—a mean-looking, rather stout old man, wrapped in a military cloak, moaning and shivering on the damp seat of a hired wherry, and relying for his safety on the fidelity and lumbar muscles of an obscure Thracian ! But the last consideration was something, and the water hissed and foamed before the prow, as the young man put his mighty thews into the stroke. When they reached the

opposite shore, he was directed to guide the boat into a narrow inlet surrounded by colonnades of gloomy piles overhanging the water. As he did so, two or three figures advanced out of the darkness and silently assisted the party to disembark. The man who left the boat last addressed Belitzar in a low tone.

“Return at once and replace the boat; your life depends upon your secrecy. Breathe a word of this to any one and you die!” And he held out a purse.

“Keep your money,” replied the Thracian with ultra-heroism. “I swear to be silent, and I require no bribe.”

Without a moment’s hesitation the man pocketed the purse, and disappeared with a smothered exclamation which sounded uncommonly like “fool!”

When Belitzar got back, Paris and the others were gone, and he found Antonina waiting for him alone. Being, as we have already learnt, a young woman of great shrewdness, she exhibited no undue curiosity, possibly because she divined that it would not be satisfied. “I hope, though, they did not forget to pay you,” she said, jestingly; “we don’t get Emperors to put across here every day.”

“One of them offered me a purse,” said Belitzar, simply, “but I refused it. I would give my life for the Emperor, why should I take a bribe for my fidelity?”

Antonina looked at him and saw that he was quite serious. "How noble you are!" she exclaimed with genuine warmth; "and so grand and strong. I am sure I must be black and blue," she added demurely; and she spanned her small waist with both hands, revealing all her beautiful outlines through the thin drapery, while she turned her face up temptingly to his, her dark eyes glittering in the moonlight.

But the feelings of Belitzar being strung up to the enthusiasm pitch, these allurements were lost upon him, and he clumsily hastened to excuse himself.

"I beg your pardon for hurting you," he said. "I was dreaming, and thought you were a fish."

"A fish?" echoed Antonina, with a delicious little shudder; "the nasty cold, slippery thing! I am sure I don't feel like that;" and she drew a little closer to him and looked up in his face again.

Belitzar was gazing intently towards the city. "Hark!" he said, "how the roar increases! And see! there are lights coming along the wall. We had better go in; we may endanger the Emperor's safety by remaining here."

"You can go," said Antonina, coldly; and the boy took her at her word and went in.

She looked after him with a curious mixture of disappointment and admiration.

"Strong, brave, and staunch as a thorough-

bred," said the charioteer's daughter, "and simple-hearted as a child;" summing up with feminine instinct, albeit in somewhat sporting diction, the qualities which characterized Belitzar throughout his eventful career. "And no mere stupid, affectionate booby, like Paris. There is brain enough inside that handsome head; and how handsome it is! Do I wish that they could change places? With such a start he might rise to be anything. Bah! what am I dreaming of? An obscure, penniless Thracian peasant! Holy saints! what is that?"

As she spoke, a tongue of yellow flame flickered into the purple sky, casting a momentary glare on the roof of St. Sophia, and sank, and flared up again, dulled and lurid, amid a column of eddying smoke. The mob had learnt the escape of the Emperor, and in their rage were firing the city.

END OF VOL. I.











